

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL 1, 1870.

BESSY RANE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER X.

PUT TO HIS CONSCIENCE.

A FINE morning in June. Lovely June ; with its bright blue skies and its summer flowers. Walking about amidst his rose-trees with their clustering blossoms, was Mr. North, a rake in his hand. He fancied he was gardening : he knew he was trifling. What did it matter?—his face looked almost happy. The glad sunshine was over-head, and he felt as free as a bird in it.

The anonymous letter, that had caused so much mischief, was passing into a thing of the past. In spite of Richard North's efforts to trace him out, the writer remained undiscovered. Timothy Wilks was the chief sufferer, and bitterly resentful thereupon. To have been openly accused of having sent it by at least six persons out of every dozen acquaintances he met, cankered the mind and curdled the temper of ill-starred Timothy Wilks. As to the general public, they were beginning to forget the trouble—as it is in the nature of a faithless public to do. Only in the hearts of a few individuals did the sad facts remain in all their rugged sternness : and, of those, one was Jelly.

Poor Mr. North could afford to be happy to-day, and for many days to come. Bessy also. Madam had relieved them of her presence yesterday, and gone careering off to Paris with her daughter. They hoped she might be away for weeks. In the seductive freedom of the home, Richard North had stayed late that morning. Mr. North was just beginning to talk with him, when some one called on business, and Richard shut himself up with the stranger. The morning had gone on ; the interview was prolonged ; but Richard was coming out now. Mr. North put down the rake.

"Has Wilson gone, Richard?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he want? He has stayed long enough!"

"Only a little business with me, father," was Richard's answer in his dutiful care. It had not been agreeable business, and Richard wished to spare his father.

"And now for Bessy, sir?" he resumed, as they paced side by side amidst the sweet-scented roses. "You were beginning to speak about her."

"Yes, I want to talk to you. Bessy would be happier with Rane than she is here, Dick."

Richard looked serious. He had no sort of objection to his sister's marrying Oliver Rane: in fact, he regarded it as an event certain to take place sooner or later; but he did not quite see that the way was clear for it yet.

"I make no doubt of that, father."

"And I think, Dick, she had better go to him now; while we are at liberty to do as we please at home."

"Now!" exclaimed Richard.

"Yes; now. That is, before Madam comes back. Poor Edmund is but just put under the sod; but—considering the circumstances—I think the memory of the dead must give place to the welfare of the living."

"But, how about ways and means, sir?"

"Ay, that's it: how about ways and means. Nothing can be spared from the works at present, I suppose, Dick."

"Nothing to speak of, sir."

Mr. North had felt ashamed even to ask the question. In fact, it was more a remark than a question, for he knew as well as Richard did that there was no superfluous money.

"Of course not, Dick. Rane gets just enough to live upon now, and no more. Yesterday, after Madam and Matilda had driven off, I was at the front gates when Rane passed. So he and I got talking about it—about Bessy. He said his income was small now, but that of course it would very considerably augment itself as soon as Alexander should have left. As he and Bessy are willing to try it, I don't see why they should not, Dick."

Richard gave no immediate reply. He had a rose in his hand and was looking at it absently, deep in thought. His father continued.

"It's not as if Rane had no expectations whatever. Two hundred a year must come to him at his mother's death. And—Dick—have you any notion how Mrs. Gass's will is left?"

"Not the least, sir."

"Oliver Rane is the nearest living relative to her late husband, Mrs. Cumberland excepted. He is Thomas Gass's own nephew—and all the

money was his. It seems to me, Dick, that Mrs. Gass is sure to remember him : perhaps largely."

"She may."

"Yes; and I think will. Bessy shall go to him; and be emancipated from her thralldom here."

"Oliver Rane has got no furniture in his house."

"He has got some. The dining-room and his bed-room are as handsomely furnished as need be. We can put in a bit more. There's some things at the Hall that were Bessy's own mother's, and she shall have them. They have not been taken much account of here, Dick, amid the grand things that Madam has filled the house with."

"She'll make a fuss, though, at their being removed," remarked Dick.

"Let her," retorted Mr. North, who could be brave as the best when two or three hundred miles lay between him and Madam. "Those things were your own dear mother's, Dick; she bought them with her own money before she married me, and I have always regarded them as heir-looms for Bessy. It's just a few plain solid mahogany things, as good as ever they were. It was our drawing-room furniture in the early days, and it will do for their drawing-room now. When Rane shall be making his six or seven hundred a year, they can buy finer, if they choose. We thought great things of it; I know that."

Richard smiled. "I remember once when I was a very little fellow, my mother came in and caught me drawing a horse on the centre-table with pen-and-ink. The trouble she had to get the horse out!—and the whipping I got!"

"Poor Dick! She did not whip often."

"It did me good, sir. I have been scrupulously careful of furniture of all kinds ever since."

"Ah, nothing like the lessons of early childhood for making an impression," spoke Mr. North. "'Spare the rod and spoil the child!' There was never a truer saying than that."

"Then you really intend them to marry at once," spoke Richard, returning to the question.

"I do," said Mr. North, in a more decisive tone than he usually spoke. "They both wish it : and why should I hold out against them? Bessy's thirty this year, you know, Dick : if girls are not wives at that age, they begin to think it hard. It's better to marry tolerably young : a man and woman don't shake down into each other's ways if they come together late in life. You are silent, Dick."

"I was thinking, sir, whether I could not manage a couple of hundred pounds for them from myself."

"You are ever generous, Dick. I don't know what we should all do without you."

"The question is—shall I give it over to them in money, or spend it for them in furniture?"

"In money; in money, Dick," advised Mr. North. "The furniture can be managed; and cash is cash. Spend it in chairs and tables and it seems as if there were nothing tangible to show for it."

Richard smiled. "It strikes me that the argument lies the other way, sir. The chairs and tables are tangible; whereas cash sometimes melts. However, I think it will be better to do as you advise. Bessy shall have two hundred pounds handed to her after her marriage, and they can do what they consider best with it."

"To be sure; to be sure, Dick. Let 'em be married; we'll put no impediment on it. Bessy has a miserable life of it here; and she'll be thirty on the twenty-ninth of this month. Oliver Rane was thirty the latter end of March."

"Only thirty!" cried Richard. "I think he must be more than that, sir."

"But he's not more," returned Mr. North. "I ought to know; and so ought you, Dick. Don't you remember they are both in the Tontine? All the children put into that tontine were born in the same year."

"Oh, was it so; I had forgotten," returned Richard carelessly, for the tontine had never much troubled him. He could just recollect that when they were children he and his brother were wont to tease little Bessy, saying if she lived to be a hundred years old she'd come into a fortune.

"That was an unlucky tontine, Dick," said Mr. North, shaking his head. "Of ten children who were entered for it, only three remain. The other seven are all dead. Four of them died in the first or second year."

"How came Oliver Rane to be put in the tontine?" asked Richard. "I thought he came to life in India—and lived there for the first few years of his life. The tontine children were all Whitborough children."

"Thomas Gass did that, Richard. When he got news that his sister had this baby—Oliver—he insisted upon putting him into the tontine. It was a sort of salve to his conscience; that's what I thought: what his sister and the poor baby wanted then was money—not to be put into a useless tontine. Ah, well, Rane has got on without anybody's assistance, and I daresay will flourish in the end."

Richard glanced at his watch; twelve o'clock; and increased his pace: a hundred and one things were wanting him at the works. Mr. North was walking with him to the gate.

"Yes, it's all for the best, Dick: they shall come together. And we'll get the wedding comfortably over while Madam's away."

"What has been her motive, sir, for opposing Bessy's engagement to Rane?"

"Motive!" returned Mr. North. "Do you see that white butterfly, Dick, fluttering senselessly about, now up, now down?—as good ask

me what *his* motive is, as ask me Madam's. I don't suppose she has any motive—except that she is given to oppose us all."

Richard supposed it was so. Something might lie also in Bessy's patient excellence as a housekeeper: Madam, ever selfish, did not perhaps like to lose her.

As they reached the iron gates, Mrs. Cumberland passed, walking slowly. She looked very ill. Mr. North arrested her, and began to speak of the projected marriage of Oliver and Bessy. Mrs. Cumberland changed colour and looked three parts scared. Unobservant Mr. North saw nothing. Richard did.

"Has Oliver not told you what's afoot?" said the former. "Young men are often shy on these matters than women."

"It is a very small income for them to begin upon," she observed, presently, when Mr. North had said what he had to say—and Richard thought he detected that she had some private objection to the union. "So very small for Bessy—who has been used to Dallory Hall."

"It won't always remain small," said Mr. North. "His practice will increase when Alexander goes; and he'll have other money, may be, later. Oh, they'll get along, Fanny. Young couples like to be poor enough to make struggling upward a pleasure. I daresay you married upon less."

"Of course, if you are satisfied, it—it must be all right," murmured Mrs. Cumberland. "You and Bessy."

She pulled her veil over her gray face, said good morning, and moved away. Not in the direction of Dallory—as she was previously walking—but back to the Ham. Mr. North turned into his grounds again; Richard went after Mrs. Cumberland.

"I beg your pardon," he said—he was not as familiar with her as his father was—"will you allow me a word. You do not like this proposed marriage. Have you aught to urge against it?"

"Only for Bessy's sake. I was thinking of her."

"Why for Bessy's sake?"

There was some slight hesitation in Mrs. Cumberland's answer. She appeared to be pulling her veil straight.

"Their income will be so small. I know what a small income is, and therefore I feel for her."

"Is that all your doubt, Mrs. Cumberland?—the smallness of the income?"

"All."

"Then I think, as my father says, you may safely leave the decision with themselves. But—*was* this all?" added Richard: for an idea to the contrary had taken hold of him. "You have no personal objection to Bessy?"

"Certainly it was all," was Mrs. Cumberland's reply. "As to any personal objection to Bessy, that I could never have. When Oliver

first told me they were engaged, I thought how lucky he was to get Bessy North; I wished them success with all my heart."

"Forgive me, Mrs. Cumberland. Thank you. Good morning."

Reassured, Richard North turned, and strode hastily away in the direction of Dallory. He fancied she had heard Bessy would have no fortune, and was feeling disappointed on her son's account. It struck him that he might as well confirm this; and he wheeled round.

Mrs. Cumberland had gone on and was already seated on the bench before spoken of, in the shady part of the road. Richard, in a few concise words, entering into no details of any sort, said to her that his sister would have no marriage portion.

"That I have long taken as a matter of course; knowing what the expenses at the Hall must be," she answered with a friendly smile. "Bessy is a fortune in herself; she would make a good wife to any man. Provided they have sufficient for comfort—and I hope Oliver will soon be making that—they can be as happy without wealth as with it, if your sister can only think so. Have you—pardon me for recalling to you what must be an unpleasant topic, Richard—have you yet gained any clue to the writer of that anonymous letter?"

"Not any. It presents mystery on all sides."

"Mystery?"

"As it seems to me. Going over the various attendant circumstances, as I do on occasion when I can get a minute to myself, I try to fit one probability into another, and I cannot compass it. We must trust to time, Mrs. Cumberland. Good morning."

Richard raised his hat, and left her. She sat on with her pain. With her pain. Mrs. Cumberland was as strictly rigid a woman in tenets as in temperament; her code of morality was a severe one. Over and over again had she asked herself whether (it is of no use to mince the matter any longer) Oliver had or had not written that anonymous letter which had killed Edmund North: and she could not answer. But, if he had done it, why then surely he ought not to wed the sister. It would be little less than sin.

Since this secret trouble had been upon her, more than a month now, her face had seemed to have assumed a grayer tinge. How gray it looked now, as she sat on the bench, passers-by saw, and almost started at. One of them was Mr. Alexander. Arresting his quick steps—he always walked as though running a race—he inquired after her health.

"Not any better and not much worse," she answered. "Complaints, such as mine, are always tediously prolonged."

"They are less severe to bear, however, than sharper ones," said the doctor, willing to administer a grain of comfort if he could. "What a lovely day it is! And Madam's off for a couple of months I hear."

"Have the two any connection, Mr. Alexander?"

"I don't know," he said, laughing. "Her presence makes winter at

the Hall, and her absence its sunshine. If I had such a wife, I'm not sure that I should think it any sin to give her an over-dose of laudanum some day, out of regard to the general peace. Did you hear of her putting Miss Bessy's wrist out?"

"No!"

"She did do it, then. Something sent her into a passion with Miss Bessy; she caught her hand and flung it away so violently that the wrist began to swell. I was sent for to bind it up. Why such women are allowed to live, I can't imagine."

"I suppose because they are not fit to die," said Mrs. Cumberland. "When are you leaving?"

"Sometime in July, I think. Or during August. I enter on my new post the 1st of September, so there's no hurry."

Mrs. Cumberland rose and continued her slow way homewards. Passing her own house, she entered that of her son. Dr. Rane was engaged with a patient, so she went on to the dining-room and waited.

He came in shortly, perhaps thinking it might be another patient, his face bright. It fell a little when he saw his mother. Her visits to him were so exceedingly rare that some instinct whispered him nothing pleasant had brought her there. She rose and faced him.

"Oliver, is it true what I hear—that you are shortly to be married?"

"I suppose it is, mother," was his answer.

"But—is there no impediment that should bar it?" she asked in a whisper.

"Well—as to waiting, I may wait to the end, and not find the skies rain gold. If Bessy's friends see no risk in it, it is not for me to see it. At any rate this will be a more peaceful home for her than the Hall."

"I am not talking of waiting,—or of gold,—or of risk. Oliver," she continued solemnly, placing both her hands on his arm, "is there nothing on your mind that ought to bar this marriage; is your conscience at rest? If—wait and let me speak, my son: I understand what you would say; what you have already told me—that you were innocent—and I know that I ought to believe you. But a doubt flashes up in my mind continually, Oliver; it is not my fault; truth knows my will is good to bury it, for ever. Bear with me a moment; I must speak. If the death of Edmund North lies at your door, however indirectly it was caused, to make his sister your wife will be a thing altogether wrong; little less than a sin in the sight of Heaven. I do not accuse you, Oliver; I suggest this as a possible case; and now I leave it with you for your own reflection. Oh, my son, believe me—for it seems to me as though I spoke with a prophet's inspiration this day! If your conscience tells you that you were not innocent, to bring Bessy North home to this roof will be wrong, and I think no blessing will rest upon it."

She was gone. Before Oliver Rane in his surprise, could answer a

word, Mrs. Cumberland was gone. Passing swiftly out at the open window, she stepped across the garden and the dwarf wire-fence, and so entered her own home.

CHAPTER XI.

WHERE'S THE RING?

APPARENTLY Dr. Rane found nothing in his conscience that could present an impediment, and the preparations for the wedding went quietly on. Secretly might almost be the better word. In their dread lest the news should reach Madam in her retreat over the water, and bring her back to stop it, those concerned deemed it well to say nothing; and no suspicion of what was afloat transpired to the world in general.

Bessy—upon whom, from her isolated position, having no lady about her, the arrangements fell—was desired to fix a day. She named the twenty-ninth of June; her birthday. After July should come in, there was no certainty about Madam's movements; she might come home, or she might not; and it was necessary that all should be over by that time, if it was to be gone through in peace. The details of the ceremony were to be of the simplest nature. Edmund North's recent death, and the other peculiar attendant circumstances, forbidding the usual gaiety. The bridal party would go to church with as little ceremony as they went to service on Sundays, Bessy in a plain silk dress and a plain bonnet. Mr. North would give his daughter away, if he were well enough; if not, Richard. Ellen Adair was to be bridesmaid; Arthur Bohun had offered himself to Dr. Rane as best man. It might be very undutiful, but Arthur enjoyed the stealing a march on Madam as much as the best of them.

Mrs. Cumberland was no doubt satisfied on the score of the scruples she had raised, since she intended to countenance the wedding, and be at church. Dr. Rane and his wife would drive away from the church door to the railway station at Whitborough. The bridal tour was to last one week only: the doctor did not care to be away longer from his patients, and Bessy confessed that she would rather be at home, setting her house in order, than prolonging her stay at small roadside inns in Wales. But for the disconcerting fact of Madam's being in Paris, Dr. Rane would have liked to take Bessy across the Channel and give her her first glimpse of the French capital. Under Madam's unjust rule, poor Bessy had never gone anywhere: Matilda North had been taken half over the world.

The new household arrangements at Dr. Rane's were to be achieved during their week's absence: the articles of furniture (that Mr. North chose to consider belonged to Bessy) to be taken from the Hall; the new carpet, Mrs. Cumberland's present, to be laid down in the drawing-

room; Molly Green to enter as helpmate to Phillis. Surely Madam would not grumble at *that*? Molly Green, going into a temper one day at some oppression of Madam's, had given warning on the spot. Bessy liked the girl: and there could be no harm in engaging her for her own housemaid.

One of those taken into the secret had been Mrs. Gass. Richard, who respected her greatly in spite of her queer grammar, and liked her too, unfolded the news. She received it in silence: a very rare thing for Mrs. Gass to do. Just as it had struck Richard in regard to Mrs. Cumberland, so it struck him now—that Mrs. Gass did not quite like the tidings.

"Well, I hope they'll be happy," she said at length, breaking the silence, "and I hope he deserves to be. I hope it with all my heart. Do you think he does, Mr. Richard?"

"Rane? Deserve to be happy? For all I see, he does. Why should he not?"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Gass, searching Richard's face. "Oliver Rane is my late husband's nephew, but he's three parts a stranger to me, except as a doctor; for it's him attends here, you know, sir,—as is natural—and not Alexander. Is he truthful, Mr. Richard? Is he trustworthy?"

"He is, for anything I know to the contrary," replied Richard North, a little wondering at the turn the conversation was taking. "If I thought he were not, I should be very sorry to give Bessy to him."

"And let us hope that he is, Mr. Richard, and wish 'em joy with all our hearts!"

That a doubt was lying on Mrs. Gass's mind in regard to the scrap of paper found in her room was certain. Being a sensible woman, it could not be but that—when surrounding mists had cleared away—she should see that the only likely place for it to have dropped from, was Dr. Rane's pocket-book. Molly Green had been subjected to a cross-examination, very cleverly conducted, as Mrs. Gass thought, which left the matter exactly as it was before. But the girl's surprise was so genuine, at supposing any receipt for making plum-pudding (for that's how Mrs. Gass put it) could have been dropped by her, that Mrs. Gass's mind could but revert to the pocket-book. How far Oliver Rane was guilty, whether guilty at all, or not, she was quite unable to decide. A small haze of doubt remained on her mind, though she was glad enough to put it from her. One thing struck her as curious, if not suspicious—that from the hour she handed him over the paper to this, Dr. Rane had never once spoken of the subject. It almost seemed to Mrs. Gass that an innocent man would: though it had only been to say, I have found no clue to the writer of that paper.

And if a modicum of the same hazy doubt rose to Richard North

during his interview with Mrs. Gass, it was due to her manner. But he was upright himself, unsuspicious as the day. The impression faded again: and he came away believing that Mrs. Gass, zealous for the Norths' honours, rather disapproved of the marriage for Bessy, on account of the doctor's poverty.

And so, there was no one to say a word of warning where it might have been effectual, and the day fixed for the wedding drew on. After all, the programme was not strictly carried out, for Mr. North had one of his nervous attacks, and could not go to church.

At five minutes past nine o'clock, in the warm bright June morning, the Dallory Hall carriage drove up to Dallory church. Richard North, his sister, and Arthur Bohun were within it. The forms and etiquette usually observed at weddings were slighted here, else how came Arthur Bohun, the bridegroom's best man, to come to church with the bride? What did it matter? So closely in its wake that the horses nearly clashed with Mr. North's, came up the other carriage—which ought to have been the first. In after days, when a strange ending had come to the marriage-life of Oliver Rane and his wife, and Oliver was regarded with dread, assailed with reproach, he said the marriage had been the Norths' doings more than his. Any way, Bessy was first at church, and both were a little late.

But Mr. North was not the only one who failed them: the other was Mrs. Cumberland. She assigned no reason for absenting herself from the ceremony, excepting a plea that she did not feel equal to it—which her son believed or not, as he pleased. Her new bright dress and bonnet were spread out on the bed; but she never as much as looked at them: and Ellen Adair found that she and Dr. Rane had to drive to the church alone, in the hired carriage, arriving there almost simultaneously with the other party.

Richard North took his sister up the aisle, the bridegroom following close on their steps. Ellen Adair and Captain Bohun, left behind, walked side by side. Bessy wore a pretty gray silk and plain white bonnet: she had a small bouquet in her hand that the gardener, Williams, had done up for her. Ellen Adair was in a similar dress, and looked altogether lovely. Mr. Lea, the clergyman, stood ready, book in hand. The spectators in the church—for the event had got wind at the last moment, as these events almost always do, and many came—rose up with expectation.

Of all the party, the bridegroom alone seemed to suffer from nervousness. His answering voice was low, his words were jerky. It was the more remarkable, because he was in general so self-contained and calm a man. Bessy, timid and yielding always, spoke with gentle firmness; not a shade of doubt or agitation seemed to cross her. But there occurred a frightful contretemps.

"The ring, if you please," whispered the officiating clergyman to

the bridegroom when the part of the service came that the ring was needed.

The ring! Oliver Rane felt in his waistcoat pocket, and went into a spasm of consternation. The ring was not there. He must have left it on his dressing-table. The little golden symbol had been wrapped in a bit of white tissue paper, and he certainly remembered putting it into his waistcoat pocket. It was as certainly not there now: and he supposed he must have put it out again.

"I have not got the ring!" he exclaimed hurriedly.

To keep a marriage ceremony waiting in the middle, while a messenger ran a mile off to get the ring and then ran a mile back again, was a thing that had never been heard of by the clergyman or any other of the scared individuals around him. What was to be done? It was suggested that perhaps somebody present could furnish a ring that might suffice. Ellen Adair, standing in her beauty behind the bride, gently laid down the glove and bouquet she was holding, took off her own glove, and gave Oliver Rane a plain gold ring from her finger: one she always wore there. Arthur Bohun alone knew the ring's history; the rest had never taken sufficient interest in *her* to enquire it; perhaps had never noticed that she wore one.

The service proceeded to its end. Had Oliver Rane gone a pilgrimage to all the jewellers' marts in Whitborough, he could not have chosen a more perfectly-fitting wedding-ring than this. When they went into the vestry, Bessy, agitated by the mishap and the emotional position altogether, burst into tears, asking Ellen how *she* came by a wedding-ring.

The history was very simple. It arose—that is, the possession of the ring—through the foolish romance of two young girls. Ellen and one of her schoolfellows named Maria Warne had formed a sincere and lasting attachment to each other. At the time of parting, when Ellen was leaving school for Mrs. Cumberland's, each had bought a plain gold ring to give the other, over which eternal friendship had been vowed, together with an undertaking to wear the ring always. Alas, for time and change! in less than six months afterwards, Ellen Adair received notice of the death of Maria Warne. The ring had in consequence become really precious to Ellen; but on this emergency she had not scrupled to part with it.

As they came out of the vestry, Ellen found herself face to face with Jelly. The clerk, and the two women pew-openers, and the sexton, considering themselves privileged people, pressed up where they chose: Jelly, who of course—living with Mrs. Cumberland—could not be at all confounded with the common spectators, chose to press with them. Her face was as long as one and a half, as she caught hold of Miss Adair.

"How *could* you, Miss Ellen?" she whispered. "Don't you know that

nothing is more unlucky than for a bride to be married with anybody else's wedding-ring?"

"But it was not a wedding-ring, Jelly. Only a plain gold one."

"Anyway it was unlucky for *you*. We have a superstition in these parts, Miss Ellen, that if a maid takes off a ring from her own finger to serve at a pinch for a bride, she'll never be a wife herself. I'd not have risked it, miss."

Ellen laughed gaily, Jelly's dismay was so real and her face so long. But there was no time for more. Richard held out his arm to her; and Oliver Rane was already taking out his bride. Close up against the door stood Mr. North's carriage, into which stepped the bride and bridegroom.

"My shawl! Where's the shawl?" asked Bessy, looking round.

She had sat down upon it; and laughed gaily when Oliver drew it out. This shawl—a thin cashmere of quiet colours—was intended to be thrown on ere they reached the station. Her silk dress covered with that, and a black lace veil substituted for the white one on her bonnet, the most susceptible maid or matron who might happen to be travelling, would never take her for a bride.

Arthur Bohun deliberately flung an old white satin slipper after the carriage—it struck the old coachman's head, and the crowding spectators shouted cheerily. Richard was going to the works. He placed Ellen in the carriage that had brought her.

"Will you pardon me, that I depute Captain Bohun to see you safely home instead of myself, Miss Adair? It is a very busy day at the works, and I must go there. Arthur, will you take care of this young lady?"

What Ellen answered, she scarcely knew. Captain Bohun got into the carriage. The situation was wholly unexpected: and if their hearts beat a little faster in the tumult of the moment's happiness, Richard at least was unconscious of it.

"It is the first wedding I ever was at," began Ellen gaily, feeling that she must talk to cover the embarrassment of the position. Both were feeling it: and got as far apart from each other as if they had quarrelled: she in one corner, he in the further one opposite. "Of course it had been arranged that I should go home with Mrs. Cumberland."

"Is she ill?"

"Dr. Rane thinks it is only nervousness: he said so as we came along. I had to come with him alone. I am sure the people we passed on the road, who had not heard about Bessy, thought it was *I* who was going to be married to him, they stared into the carriage so."

Ellen laughed as she said it. Arthur Bohun, drinking in draughts of her wondrous beauty, glanced at her meaningly, his blue eyes involuntarily betraying his earnest love.

"It may be your turn next, Ellen."

She blushed vividly, and looked from the window as though she saw something passing. He felt tempted there and then to speak of his love. But he had a large sense of the fitness of the time and place; and she had been placed for these few minutes under his protection: it seemed like putting him on his honour, as schoolboys say. Besides, he had fully made up his mind not to speak until he saw his way clear to marry.

Ellen Adair brought her beaming face round again. "Jelly is in a terrible way about the ring, foretelling all kinds of ill-luck to everybody concerned, and thankful it did not happen to *her*. Will Bessy keep my ring always, do you think? Perhaps she'd not be legally married if she gave it me back and took to her own—when it is found?"

Arthur Bohun's eyes danced a little. "Perhaps not," he replied, in the gravest of tones. "I cannot tell what they would have done without it, Ellen."

"I did not tell Bessy one thing, when she asked me about it in the vestry. I will never tell her if I can help it—that Maria Warne is dead. How was it Mr. North did not come?"

"Nervousness too, in my opinion. He said he was ill."

"Why should he be nervous?"

"Lest it should come to his wife's ears—that he had so far countenanced the marriage as to be present at it."

"Can you tell why Mrs. North should set her face against it?"

"No. Unless it is because other people have wished it. I should only say as much to you, though, Ellen: she is my mother."

The implied confidence sounded very precious in her ears. She turned to the window again.

"I hope they will be happy. I think there is no doubt of it. Bessy is very sweet-tempered and gentle."

"He is good-tempered too."

"Yes I think so. I have seen but little of him. There's Mrs. Gass!"

They were passing that lady's house. She sat at the open window; a grand amber gown on, white satin ribbons in her cap. Leaning out, she shook her handkerchief at them in violent greeting, just as though they had been the bride and bridegroom. As Ellen drew back in her corner after bowing, her foot touched something on the carpet at the bottom of the carriage.

"Why! what is this?"

They both stooped at once. It was the wedding-ring enclosed in its bit of tissue paper. Captain Bohun unfolded the paper.

"Dr. Rane must have lost it out of his pocket as we went along," cried Ellen. "He said, you know, that he felt so sure he had put it in. What is to be done with it?"

"Wear it instead of your own until they come back," said Arthur. "Bessy can then take her choice of the two."

Accepting the suggestion without thought of dissent, Ellen took off her right glove, and held out the other hand for the ring. He did not give it. Bending forward, he took her right hand and put it on for her.

"It fits as well as my own did." Their eyes met. He had her hand still, as if trying the fit. Her sweet face was like a damask rose.

"I trust I may put one on to better purpose some day, Ellen," came the murmuring, whispered, tremulous words. "Meanwhile—if Bessy does not claim this, remember that I have placed it on your finger."

Not another syllable, not another look from either. Captain Bohun sat down in his corner; Ellen in hers, her hot face bent over the glove she was putting on, and fully believing that the carriage had changed into Paradise.

CHAPTER XII.

PUTTING DOWN THE CARPET.

THE days went on, and Dr. Rane's house was being made ready for the reception of the bride. No time could be lost, as the wedding tour was intended to be so short a one. As Jelly said, They'd be at home before folks could look round. Mrs. Cumberland presented the new carpet for the drawing-room; the furniture, that had been the first Mrs. North's, arrived from Dallory Hall. Molly Green arrived with it, equally to take up her abode in the house of Dr. Rane. The arranging of these things, with the rest of the preparations, was carried on with a considerable deal of bustle and gossip, Jelly being in at the doctor's house continually, and constituting herself chief mistress of the ceremonies. Phillis and Molly Green, with native humility, deferred to her in all things.

It was said in a previous chapter that Jelly was one of those who retained an interest in the anonymous letter. She had a special cause for it. Jelly, in her propensity to look into her neighbours' affairs, was given to take up any mysterious cause, and make it hers. Her love of the marvellous was great, her curiosity insatiable. But Jelly's interest in this matter really was a personal one and concerned herself. It was connected with Timothy Wilks.

Amidst Jelly's other qualities and endowments, might be ranked one that took almost the pre-eminence—love of admiration. Jelly could not remember to have been without an "acquaintance" for above a month at a time since the days when she left off pinafores. No sooner did she quarrel with one young man and dismiss him, than she took on another. Dallory wondered that of all her numerous acquaintances she had not got married: but, as Jelly coolly said, to have a suitor at your

beck and call was one thing, and to be tied to a husband quite another. So Jelly was Jelly still: and perhaps it might be conceded that the fault was her own. She liked her independence.

The reigning "acquaintance" at this present period happened to be Timothy Wilks. Jelly patronized *him*; *he* was devoted to her. There was a trifling difference in their ages—some ten years probably, and all on Jelly's side—but that disparity had often happened before. Jelly had distinguished Tim by the honour of taking him to be her young man; and when the damaging whisper fell upon him, that he had probably written the anonymous letter resulting in the death of Edmund North, Jelly resented the aspersion far more than Timothy did. "I'll find out who did do it if it costs me a year's wages and six months' patience," avowed Jelly to herself in the first burst of indignation.

But Jelly found she could not arrive at that satisfactory result any quicker than other people. It's true she possessed a slight clue that they did not, in the few memorable words she had overheard pass that moonlight night between her mistress and Dr. Rane; but they did not serve her. The copy of the letter was said to have dropped out of Dr. Rane's pocket-book on somebody's carpet, and he denied that it had so dropped. Neither more nor less could Jelly make of the matter than this: and she laboured under the disadvantage of not being able to speak of the over-heard words, unless she confessed that she had been a listener. Considering who had been the speakers, Jelly did not choose to do that. From that time until this, a good two months, had the matter rankled in Jelly's mind; she had kept her ears wide open and put cautious questions wherever she thought they might avail; and all to no purpose. But in this, the first week of July, Jelly got a slight light thrown on the clue from Molly Green. The very day that damsel arrived at Dr. Rane's as helpmate to Phillis, and Jelly had gone in with her orderings, the conversation happened to turn on plum-pudding—Phillis having made a currant-dumpling for dinner, and let the water get into it—and Molly Green dropped a few words which Jelly's pricking ears caught up. They were only to the effect that Mrs. Gass had asked her whether she did not let fall on her carpet a receipt, for making plum-pudding, the night of Edmund North's attack; which receipt, Mrs. Gass had said, might have belonged to Madam, and been brought from the Hall by Molly Green's petticoats. Jelly put a wary question or two to the girl, and then let the topic pass without comment. That same evening she betook herself to Mrs. Gass, acting craftily. "Where's that paper that was found on your carpet the night Edmund North was taken?" asked Jelly with bold tongue. Upon which Mrs. Gass was seized with astonishment so entire that in the moment's confusion she made one or two inconvenient admissions, just stopping short of the half-suspicion she had entertained of Dr. Rane.

In the days gone by, when Mrs. Gass was a servant herself, Jelly's

relatives—really respectable people—had patronized her. Mrs. Gass got promoted to be what she was; but she assumed no fine airs in consequence, as the reader has heard, and she and Jelly had remained very good friends. Vexed with herself for having incautiously admitted that the paper found *was* the copy of the anonymous letter, Mrs. Gass turned round on Jelly and gave her a good sharp reprimand for taking her unawares, and for trying to pry into what did not concern her. Jelly came away, not very much wiser than she went, but with a spirit of unrest that altogether refused to be soothed. She dared not pursue the enquiry openly, out of respect to her mistress and Dr. Rane, but she resolved to pump Molly Green. This same Molly was niece to the people with whom Timothy Wilks lodged, and rather more friendly with the latter gentleman than Jelly liked.

On the following morning when Jelly had swallowed her breakfast, she went into the next house with her usual lack of ceremony. Phillis and Molly Green were on their knees laying down the new carpet in the drawing-room, tugging and hammering to the best of their ability, their gowns pinned round their waists, their sleeves stripped to the elbows; Phillis little and old and weak-looking; Molly a comely girl of twenty, with red cheeks.

"Well, you must be two fools!" was Jelly's greeting, after taking in appearances. "As if you could expect to put down a heavy Brussels yourselves! Why didn't you get Turtle's men here? They served the carpet, and they ought to come to put it down."

"They promised to be here at seven o'clock this morning; and now it's nine," mildly responded Phillis, her nice dark eyes raised to Jelly's. "We thought we'd try and do it ourselves, so as to be able to get the tables and chairs in, and the room finished. Perhaps Turtles have forgot it."

"I'd forget them, I know, if it was me, when I wanted to buy another carpet," said Jelly, tartly.

But, even as she spoke, a vehicle was heard to stop at the gate. Inquisitive Jelly looked from the window, and recognized it for Turtle's. It seemed to contain one or two pieces of new furniture. Phillis did not know that any had been coming, and went out. Molly Green rose from her knees, and stood regarding the carpet. This was Jelly's opportunity.

"Now then!" she sharply cried, confronting the girl, with imperious gesture. "Did you drop that, or did you not, Molly Green?"

Molly Green seemed all abroad at the address—as well she might be. "Drop what?" she asked.

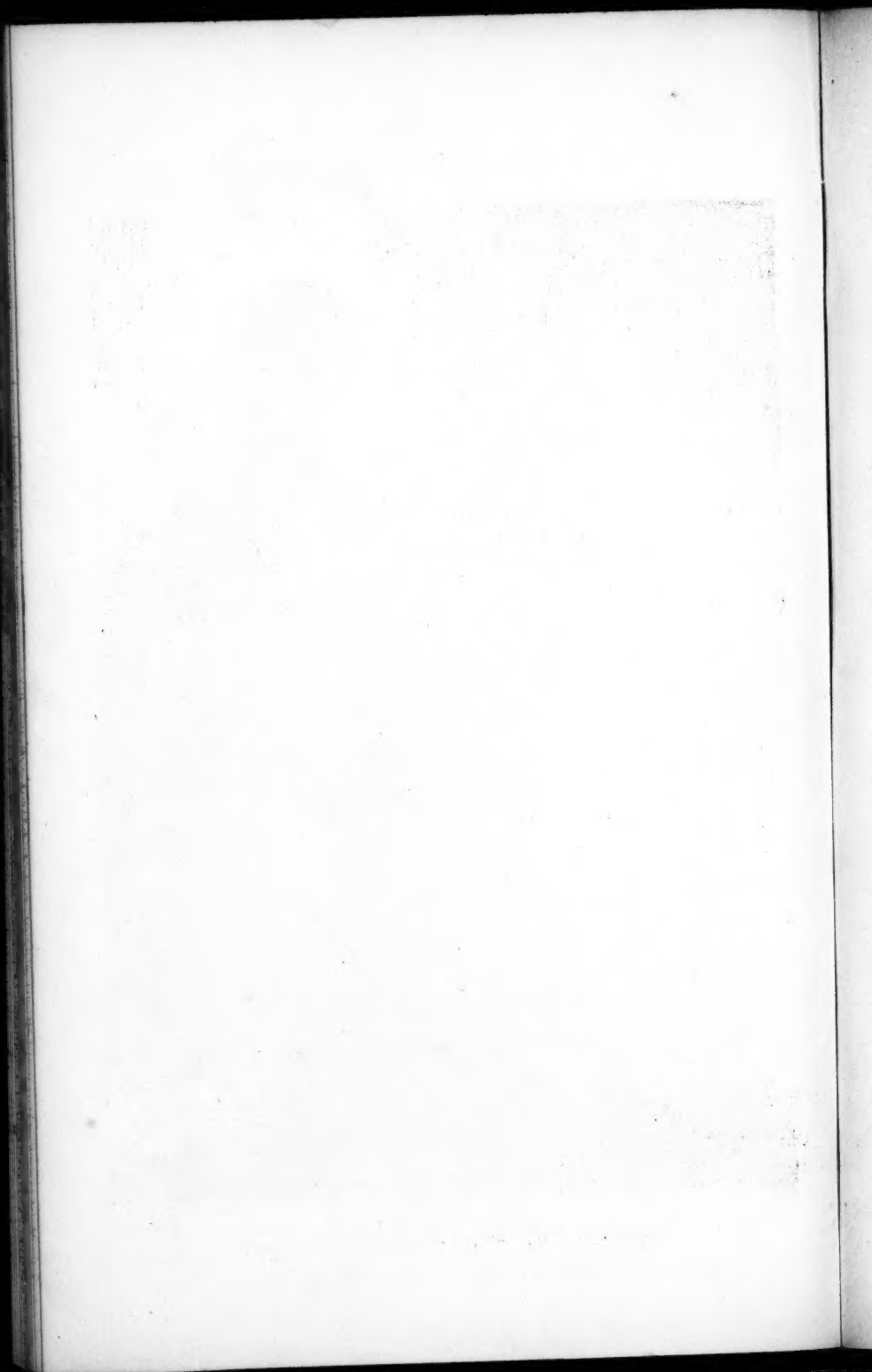
"That plum-pudding receipt on Mrs. Gass's parlour carpet."

"Well I never!" returned Molly after a pause of surprise. "What is it to you, Jelly, if I did?"

Now the girl only so spoke by way of retort; in a sort of banter.



““ Now then, Molly! did you drop THAT, or did you not?””



Jelly, hardly believing her ears, took it to be an admission that she did drop it. And so the two went floundering on, quite at cross-purposes.

"Don't stare at me like that, Molly Green. I want a straight-for'rard answer. Did it drop from your skirts?"

"It didn't drop from my hands. As to staring, it's you that's doing that, Jelly, not me."

"Where had you picked up the receipt from?—Out of Mr. Edmund North's room?"

"Out of Mr. Edmund North's room!" echoed Molly in wonder. "Whatever should have brought me a-doing that?"

"It was the night he was taken ill."

"And if it was! I didn't go a-nigh him."

A frightful thought now came over Jelly, turning her quite faint. What if the girl had gone to her Aunt Green's that night and picked the paper up there? In that case it could not fail to be traced home to Timothy Wilks.

"Did you call in at your aunt's that same evening, Molly Green?"

"Suppose I did?" retorted Molly.

"And how *dare* you call in there, and bring—bring—receipts away with you surreptitious?" shrieked Jelly in her temper.

Molly Green stooped to pick up the hammer, lying at her feet, speaking quietly as she did so. Some noise was beginning to be heard outside, caused by Turtle's men getting a piano into the house, and Phillis talking to them.

"I can't think what you are a-driving at, Jelly. As to calling in at aunt's, I have a right to do it when I'm out, if time allows. Which it had not that right, at any rate, for I never went nowhere but to the druggist's, and Mrs. Gass's. I scuttered all the way to Dallory, and scuttered back again; and I don't think I stopped to speak to a single soul, but Timothy Wilks."

Jelly's spirits, which had been rising, fell again to wrath at the name. "You'd better say you got it from *him*, Molly Green. Don't spare him, poor fellow; whiten yourself."

Molly was beginning to feel just a little wrathful in her turn. Though Jelly was a lady's-maid and superior to herself with her red arms and rough hands, that could not be a reason for attacking her in this way.

"And what if I did get it from him, pray? Come! A plum-pudding perscription's no crime."

"But a copy of an anonymous letter *is*," retorted Jelly, the moment's anger causing her to lose sight of caution. "Don't you try to brazen it out to me, girl."

"WHAT?" cried Molly, staring with all her eyes.

But in the intervening moment Jelly's senses had come back to her. She set herself coolly to remedy the mischief.

"To think that my mind should have run off from the pudding re-

ceipt to that letter of poor Mr. Edmund's! It's your fault, Molly Green—bothering my wits out of me! Where *did* you pick up the paper? There. Answer that; and let's end it."

Molly thought it might be as well to end it; she was getting tired of the play: besides, here were Turtle's men coming into the room to finish the carpet.

"I never had the receipt at all, Jelly, and it's not possible it could have dropped from me; that's the blessed truth. After talking to me, just as you've done, and turning me inside out, as one may say, Mrs. Gass as good as confessed that it might have fell out of her own bundle of receipts that she keeps in the sideboard drawer."

Slowly Jelly arrived at a conviction that Molly Green, in regard to her own non-participation in dropping the paper, must be telling the truth. It did not tend to lessen her wrath.

"Then why on earth have you been keeping up this farce with me? I'll teach you manners with your betters, girl."

"Well, why did you set upon me?" was the good-humoured answer. "There's no such great treason in dropping a plum-pudding paper, even if I had done it—which I didn't. 'Tain't a love-letter. I don't like to be brow-beat for nothing: and it's not your place to do it, Jelly."

Jelly said no more. Little did she suspect that Mr. Richard North, leaning against the door-post of the half-open drawing-room door, while he watched the movements of the men, had heard every syllable of the colloquy. Coming round to see what progress was being made in the house, before he went to the works for the day, it chanced that he arrived at the same time as Turtle's cart. The new piano was a present from himself to Bessy.

Turtle's men, leaving the piano in the hall, went into the room to finish the carpet, and Jelly came out of it. She found her arm touched by Mr. Richard North. He motioned her into the dining-parlour; followed, and closed the door.

"Will you tell me the meaning of what you have just been saying to Molly Green?"

The sudden question—as Jelly acknowledged to herself afterwards—made her creep all over. For once in her life she was dumb.

"I heard all you said, Jelly, happening to be standing accidentally at the door. What was it that was dropped on Mrs. Gass's carpet the night of my brother's illness?"

"It—was—a receipt for making plum-pudding, sir," stammered Jelly, turning a little white.

"I think not, Jelly," replied Richard North, gazing into her eyes with quiet firmness. "You spoke of a copy of an anonymous letter; and I am sure, by your tone, you were then speaking truth. As I have overheard this much, you must give me an explanation."

"I'd have spent a pound out of my pocket, rather than this should have happened," cried Jelly, with much ardour.

"You need not fear to tell *me*. I am no tattler, as you know."

Had there been only the ghost of a chance to stand out against the command, Jelly would have caught at it. But there was not. She disclosed what she knew: more than she need have done. Warming with her subject, when the narrative had fairly set in—as it was in Jelly's gossiping nature to warm—she told also of the interview she had been a partial witness to between Mrs. Cumberland and the doctor, and the words she had heard them say.

Richard North looked grave—startled. He said very little: only cautioned Jelly never to speak of the subject again to other people.

"I suppose you will be asking Mrs. Gass about it, sir," cried Jelly, as he was turning to leave.

"I shall. And should be thankful to hear from her that it really was nothing more than a receipt for plum-pudding, Jelly."

Jelly's head gave an incredulous toss. "I hope you'll not let her think that I up and told you spontaneous, Mr. Richard. After saying to her that I should never open my lips about it to living mortal, she'd think I can't keep my word, sir."

"Be at ease, Jelly: she shall not suppose I learnt it by aught but accident."

"And I am glad he knows it, after all!" decided Jelly to herself as she watched him away up the Ham. "Perhaps he'll now be able to get at the rights and the wrongs."

Richard North walked along, full of tumultuous trouble. It could not be but that he should have caught up a suspicion of Oliver Rane—now his brother-in-law—that he might have been the author of the anonymous letter. How, else, should its copy have dropped from his pocket-book—if indeed it had so dropped? Jelly had not thrown so much as a shadow of hint upon the doctor; either she failed to see the obvious inference, or controlled her tongue to caution: but Richard North could put two-and-two together. He went straight to Mrs. Gass's, and found that lady at breakfast in her dining-parlour, with the window thrown up to the warm summer-air.

"What's it you, Mr. Richard?" she cried, rising to shake hands. "I am a'most ashamed to be found a breakfasting at this hour; but the truth is, I overslept myself: and that idiot of a girl never came to tell me the time. The first part o' the night I got no sleep at all: 't were three o'clock afore I closed my eyes."

"Were you not well?" asked Richard.

"I'd got a touch of my stomach-pain; nothing more. Which is indigestion, Dr. Rane says: and he's about right. Is it a compliment to ask you to take some breakfast, Mr. Richard, sir? Them eggs are fresh, and here's some down-right good tea."

Richard answered that it would be only a compliment ; he had breakfasted with his father and Arthur Bohun before leaving home. His eyes ran dreamily over the white damask cloth : as if he were admiring what stood on it : the pretty china, the well-kept silver, the glass with a bunch of fresh roses in it. Mrs. Gass liked to have things nice about her, although people called her vulgar. In reality Richard saw nothing. His mind was absorbed with what he had to ask, and with how he should ask it.

In a pause, made by Mrs. Gass's draining her cup of tea and pushing her plate from her, Richard North bent forward and opened the communication, speaking in a low and confidential tone.

"I have come to you thus early for a little information, Mrs. Gass. Will you kindly tell me what were the contents of the paper that was found here on your carpet, the night of Edmund's seizure?"

From the look that Mrs. Gass's countenance assumed at the question, it might have been thought that she was about to have a seizure herself. Her eyes grew round, her cheeks and nose red. For a full minute she made no answer.

"What on earth cause have you to ask me that, Mr. Richard? You can't know nothing about it."

"Yes I can; and do. I know that such a paper was found; I fear it was a copy of the anonymous letter. But I have to come to you to learn particulars."

"My patience!" ejaculated Mrs. Gass. "To think you should have got hold of it at last. Who in the world told you, sir?"

"Jelly. But——"

"Drat that girl!" warmly interposed Mrs. Gass. "Her tongue is as long as from here to yonder."

"But not intentionally, I was about to add. I overheard her say a chance word, and I insisted upon her disclosing to me what she knew. There is no blame due to Jelly, Mrs. Gass."

"I say Yes there is, Mr. Richard. What right has she got to blab out chance words about other folks's business? Let her stick to her own. That tongue of hers is worse than a steam-engine: once set it going, it won't be stopped."

"Well, we will leave Jelly. It may be for the better that I should know this. Tell me all about it, my dear old friend."

Thus adjured Mrs. Gass spoke; telling the tale from the beginning. Richard listened in silence.

"He denied that it came out of his pocket-book?" was the first remark he made.

"Denied it out and out. And then my thoughts turned naturally to Molly Green: for no other stranger had been in the room but them two. He said perhaps she had brought it in her petticoats from the Hall: but I don't think it could have been. I'm afraid—I'm

afraid, Mr. Richard—that it must have dropped from his pocket-book.”

Their eyes met: each hesitating to speak out the conviction lying at heart, notwithstanding there had been confidential secrets between them before to-day. Richard was thinking that he ought not to have married Bessy—at least, until it was cleared up.

“Why did you not tell me, Mrs. Gass?”

“It was in my mind to do so—I said a word or two—but then, you see, I *couldn't* think it was him that writ it,” was her answer. “Mrs. Cumberland told me she saw the enonymous letter itself, Mr. North showed it her, and that it was not a bit like any handwriting she ever met. Suppose he is innocent—would it have been right for me to come out with a tale, even to you, Mr. Richard, that he might have been guilty?”

On this point Richard said no more. All the talking in the world now could not undo the marriage, and he was never one to reproach uselessly. Mrs. Gass resumed.

“If I had spoke ever so, I don't suppose it would have altered things, Mr. Richard. There was no proof; and, failing that, you'd not have liked to say anything at all to Miss Bessy. Any way they are man and wife now.”

“I hope—I *hope* he did not write it!” said Richard fervently.

Mrs. Gass gave a sweep with her arm to all the china together, as she bent her earnest red face nearer Richard's.

“Let's remember this much to our comfort, Mr. Richard: if it *was* him, he never thought to harm a hair of your brother's head. He must have writ it to damage Alexander. Oliver Rane has looked upon Alexander as his mortal enemy,—as a man who ought to be kicked,—as a man who did him a right down bad turn and spoilt his prospects,—as a man upon whom it was a'most a duty to be revenged.”

“Do you think this?” cried Richard, rather at sea.

“No; but I say he thinks it. He never meant worse nor better by the letter than to drive Alexander away from the place where, as Rane fancies, he only got a footing by treachery. That is, *if* he writ it: sometimes I think he did, and sometimes I think he didn't.”

“What is to be done?”

“Nothing. You can do nothing. You and me must just bury it between us, Mr. Richard, sir, for Miss Bessy's sake. It would be a nasty thing for her if a whisper of this should get abroad, let him be as innocent as the babe unborn. They are fond of one another, and it would just be a cruelty to have stopped the marriage with *this*. He is a good-intentioned man, and I don't see but what they'll be happy together. Let us hope that he has made his peace with the Lord, and that it won't be visited upon him.”

“Amen!” was the mental response of Richard North.

CHAPTER XIII.

COMING HOME.

DASHING up to Dallory Hall in a fiery foam, just a week and a day after the wedding, came Mrs. North. Madam had learnt the news. While she was reposing in all security in Paris, amid a knot of friends who had chosen to be there at that season, Matilda North happened to take up a *Times* newspaper of some two or three days old, and saw the account of the marriage: "Oliver Rane, M.D., of Dallory Ham, to Bessy, daughter of John North, of Dallory Hall, and of Elizabeth, his first wife." Madam rose up, her face in a flame, and clutched the journal to look: she verily believed Miss Matilda was playing a farce. No: the announcement was there in plain black and white. Making her hasty arrangements to quit the French capital, she came thundering home: and arrived the very day that Dr. and Mrs. Rane returned.

A letter had preceded her. A letter of denouncing wrath, that had made her husband shake in his shoes. Poor Mr. North looked tremblingly out for the arrival, caught a glimpse of the carriage and of Madam's face, and slipped out at the back door to the fields. Where he remained wandering about for hours.

So Madam found nobody to receive her. Richard was at the works, Captain Bohun had been out all the afternoon. Nothing increases wrath like the having no object to expend it on; and Madam, foiled, might have sat for a picture of fury. The passion that had been bubbling up higher and higher all the way from Paris, found no escape at its boiling point.

One of the servants happened to come in her way; the first housemaid, who had been head over Molly Green. Madam pinned her; bit her lips for calmness, and then enquired particulars of the wedding with a smooth face.

"Was it a run-a-way match, Lake?"

"Goodness, no, Madam!" was Lake's answer, who was apt to be free with her tongue, even to her imperious mistress. "Things were being got ready for a month beforehand; and my master would have gone to church to give Miss Bessy away himself, but for not being well. All us servants went to see it."

Little by little, Madam heard the details. Captain Bohun was best man; Mr. Richard took out Miss Adair, who was bridesmaid and looked lovely to behold. The bride and bridegroom drove right away from the church door. Captain Bohun went back in the carriage with Miss Adair; Mr. Richard went off on foot to the works. Miss Bessy—leastways Mrs. Oliver Rane now—had had some furniture sent to her new home from the Hall, and Molly Green was there as housemaid. That Lake should be glowing with intense gratification at being en-

abled to tell all this, was only in accordance with frail human nature : she knew what a pill it was for Madam ; and Madam was disliked in the household worse than poison. But Lake was hardly prepared for the ashy tint that spread over Madam's features, when she came to the part that told of the homeward drive together of her son and Ellen Adair.

The girl was in the midst of her descriptions when Arthur Bohun came in. Madam saw him sauntering lazily up the gravel drive, and swept down in her fine Parisian costume of white-and-black brocaded silk, lappets of lace floating from her hair. They met in the Hall.

"Why ! is it you, mother ?" cried Arthur, in surprise—for he had no idea the invasion might be expected so soon. "Have you come home ?"

He advanced to kiss her. Striving to be as dutiful as she would let him be, he was willing to observe all ordinary relations between mother and son : but of affection there existed none. Mrs. North drew back from the offered embrace, and haughtily motioned him to the drawing-room. Matilda sat there, sullen and listless ; she was angry at being dragged summarily from Paris.

"Why did I assist at Bessy's wedding ?" replied Arthur, parrying the attack with light good humour, as he invariably strove to do on these wrathful occasions. "Because I liked it. It was great fun. Especially to see Rane hunting in every pocket for the ring, and turning as red as a salamander."

"What business had you to do such a thing," retorted Madam, her face dark with the passion she was suppressing. "How dared you do it ?"

"Do what, Madam ?"

Madam stamped a little. "You know without asking, sir : countenance personally the wedding."

"Was there any reason why I should not ? Bessy stands to me as a sister ; and I like her. I am glad she is married, and I hope sincerely they'll have the best of luck always."

"I had forbidden the union with Oliver Rane," stamped Madam. "Do you hear—*forbidden* it. You knew that as well as she did."

"But then, don't you see, mother mine, you had no particular right to forbid it. If Matilda there took it into her head to marry some knight or other, you would have a voice in the matter, for or against ; but Bessy was responsible to her father only."

"Don't bring my name into your nonsense, Arthur," struck in Matilda, with a frown.

Madam, looking from one to the other, was biting her lips.

"They had the wedding while you were away that it might be got over quietly," resumed Arthur, in his laughing way, determined not to give in an inch, even though he had to tell a home truth or two.

"For my part, mother, I have never understood what possible objection you could have to Rane."

"That is my business," spoke Mrs. North. "I wish he and those Cumberland people were all at the bottom of the sea. How dared you disgrace yourself, Arthur Bohun?"

"Disgrace myself?"

"You did. You, a Bohun, to descend to a companionship with *them*! Fie upon you! And you have been said to inherit your father's pride."

"As I hope I do, in all proper things. I am unable to understand your distinctions, Madam," he added laughingly. "Rane is as good as Bessy, for all I see. As good as we are."

Madam caught up a hand screen, as if she would have liked to fling it at him. Her hand trembled, with emotion or temper.

"There's some girl living with them. They tell me you went home with her in the carriage!"

Arthur Bohun suddenly turned his back upon them, as if to see who might be advancing, for distant footsteps were heard advancing. But for that, Madam might have seen a hot flush illumine his face.

"Well? What else, mother? Of course I took her home—Miss Adair."

"In the face and eyes of Dallory!"

"Certainly. And we had faces and eyes out that morning, I can tell you. It is not every day a Miss North gets married."

"How came *you* to take her?"

"Dick asked me. There was nobody else to ask, you see. Mrs. Gass clapped us going by, as if we had been at an election. She had a stiff shining yellow gown on and white bows in her cap."

His suavity was so great, his determination not to be ruffled so evident, that Mrs. North felt three parts foiled. It was not often she attacked Arthur; he always met it in this way, and no satisfaction came of it. She could have struck him as he stood.

"What *is* the true tale about the ring, Arthur?" asked Matilda in the silence come to by Mrs. North. "Lake says Oliver Rane really lost it."

"Really and truly, Matty."

"Were they married without a ring?"

"Somebody present produced one," he replied carelessly, in his invincible dislike to mention Ellen Adair before his mother and sister: a dislike that had ever clung to him. Did it arise from the shy reticence that invariably attends love, this feeling?—or could it have been some foreshadowing, dread instinct of what the future was to bring forth?

"How came Dr. Rane to lose the ring?"

"Carelessness, I suppose. We found it in the carriage, going home. He must have dropped it accidentally."

"Peace, Matilda!—keep your foolish questions for a fitting time," stormed Madam. "How dare you turn your back upon me, Arthur? What money has gone out with the girl?"

Arthur turned round to answer. In spite of his careless manner, he was biting his lips with shame and vexation. It was so often he had to blush for his mother.

"I'm sure I don't know, if you mean with Bessy: it is not my business that I should presume to ask. Here comes Dick: I thought it was his step. You can enquire of him, Madam."

Richard North looked into the drawing-room, all unconscious of the storm awaiting him. Matilda sat back in an easy-chair tapping her foot discontentedly; Arthur Bohun toyed with a rose at the window; Madam, standing upright by the beautiful inlaid table, her train sweeping the rich carpet, confronted him.

But there was something about Richard North that instinctively subdued Madam: she had never domineered over him as she did over her husband and Bessy and Arthur; and at him she did not rave and rant. Calm always, sufficiently courteous to her, and yet holding his own in self-respect, Richard and Madam seldom came to an issue. But she attacked him now: demanding why this iniquity—the wedding—had been allowed to be enacted.

"Pardon me, Mrs. North, if I meet your question by another," calmly spoke Richard. "You complain of my sister's marriage as though it were a grievous wrong against yourself. What is the reason?"

"I said it should not take place."

"Will you tell me why you oppose it?"

"No. It is sufficient that, to my mind, it did not present itself as suitable. I have resolutely set my face against Dr. Rane and his statue of a mother, who presumes to call the Master of Dallory Hall John! And I forbade Bessy to think of him."

"But—pardon me, Mrs. North—Bessy was not bound to obey you. Her father and I saw no cause for objecting to Dr. Rane."

"Was it right, was it honourable, that you should seize upon my absence to marry her in this indecent manner?—before Edmund was cold in his grave?"

"Circumstances guide cases," said Richard. "As for marrying her while you were away, it was done in the interests of peace. Your opposition, had you been at home, would not have prevented the marriage; it was therefore as well to get it over in quietness."

A bold avowal. Richard stood before Madam when he made it, upright as herself. She saw it was useless to contend: and all the abuse in the world would not undo it now.

"What money has gone out with her?"

It was a question that she had no right to put. Richard answered it however.

"At present not any. To-morrow I shall give Rane a cheque for two hundred pounds. Time was, Madam, when I thought my sister would have gone from us with twenty thousand."

"We are not speaking of what was, but of what is," said Madam, an unpleasant sneer on her face. "Mr. North—to hear him speak—cannot spare the two hundred."

"Quite true; Mr. North has it not to spare," said Richard. "It is I who give it to my sister. Drained though we are for money perpetually, I could not, for very shame, suffer Bessy to go to her husband wholly penniless."

"She has not gone penniless," retorted Madam, brazening the thing out. "I hear the Hall has been dismantled for her."

"Oh, mother!" interposed Arthur in a burst of pain.

"Hold your tongue; it is no affair of *yours*," spoke Mrs. North.

"A cart-load of furniture has gone out of the Hall."

"Bessy's own," said Richard. "It was her mother's; and we have always considered it Bessy's. A few poor mahogany things, Madam, that you have never condescended to take notice of, and that never, in point of fact have belonged to you. They have gone with Bessy, poor girl; and I trust Rane will make her a happier home than she has had here."

"I trust they will both be miserable!" flashed Madam.

Equable in temper though Richard North was, there are limits to endurance; he found his anger rising, and quitted the room abruptly. Arthur Bohun went limping after him: in any season of emotion, he was undeniably lame.

"I'd beg your pardon for her, Dick, in all entreaty," he whispered, putting his arm within Richard's, "but that my tongue is tied with shame and humiliation. It was an awful misfortune for you all when your father married her."

"We can but make the best of it, Arthur," was the kindly answer.

"It was neither your fault nor mine."

"Where is the good old pater?"

"Hiding somewhere. Not a doubt of it."

"Let us go and find him, Dick. He may be the better for having us with him to-day. If she were not my mother—and upon my word and honour, Richard, I sometimes think she is not—I'd strap on my armour and do brave battle for him."

The bride and bridegroom were settling down in their house. Bessy, arranging her furniture in her new home, was busy and happy as the summer day was long. Some of the mahogany things were sadly old-fashioned, but the fact never occurred to Bessy. The carpet was bright; the piano, Richard's present, and a great surprise, was beautiful. It was so kind of him to give her one—she who was

but a poor player at best, and had thought of asking Madam to be allowed to have the unused old thing in the old school-room at Dallory Hall. She clung to Richard with tears in her eyes as she kissed and thanked him. He kissed her again, and gave his good wishes for her happiness, but Bessy thought him somewhat out of spirits. Richard North handed over two hundred pounds to them : a most acceptable offering to Dr. Rane.

"Thank you, Richard," he heartily said, grasping his brother-in-law's hand. "I shall be getting on so well shortly as to need no help for my wife's sake or for mine." And Richard knew that he was anticipating the period when the other doctor should have gone, and the whole practice be in his own hands.

It was on the third or fourth morning after their return, that Dr. Rane, coming home from seeing his patients, met his fellow-surgeon, arm-in-arm with a stranger. Mr. Alexander stopped to introduce him.

"Mr. Seeley, Rane," he said. "My friend and successor."

Had a shot been fired at Dr. Rane, he could scarcely have felt more. In the moment's confused blow, he almost stammered.

"Your successor? Here?"

"My successor in the practice. I have sold him the good-will, and he has come down to be introduced."

Dr. Rane bowed. The new doctor put out his hand. That same day Dr. Rane went over to Mr. Alexander's and reproached him.

"You might at least have given me the refusal had you wanted to sell it."

"My good fellow, I promised it to Seeley ages ago," was the answer. "He knew I had a prospect of the London appointment : in fact, helped me to get it."

What was to be said? Nothing. But Oliver Rane felt as though a bitter blow had again fallen upon him, blighting the fair vista of the future.

"Don't be down-hearted, Oliver," whispered Bessy hopefully, as she clung around him when he went in and spoke of the disappointment. "We shall be just as happy with a small practice as a large one. It will all come right—with God's blessing on us."

But Oliver Rane, looking back on a certain deed of the past, felt by no means sure in his heart of hearts that the blessing would be upon them.

(To be continued.)

A SONG OF HOPE.

HER pallid face the wintry morn upreared—

Oh, face of silence, with the drooping lid,

In wreathing mist thy mocking beauties hid ;

So young, and yet with aspect chill and weird !

My heart sank in my breast, I looked afar,

The icy vapour did all heaven bar ;

On one gaunt tree there sat a tiny bird,

That chirped, and chirped, each note a cheery word :

“ Hope for thee,

Hope for me,

The sap's but sleeping in the tree.”

I sat, and watched the brasen sun arise ;

It glared all redly, but no vivid beam

Could pierce the mist-wraith with a single gleam,

To fling its glittering radiance in mine eyes.

And yet my heart rose up ; the light was there,

Had somehow struggled through the frigid air ;

And that brave bird, alone of all the throng,

Still chirped, and chirped, a very hero-song :

“ Hope for thee,

Hope for me,

The buds are swelling on the tree.”

Some later day, my spirit whispering says,

When from her face the rimy tears have rolled,

And sunlight tipped her dewy locks with gold,

This wintry morn will claim her song of praise.

Then, in my thought, my leaping heart will prize

The silent drooping of her filmy eyes ;

My voice will join the bird's exultant throat,

Who'll chirp, and chirp, with ever clearer note :

“ Hope for thee,

Hope for me,

The fruit is ripening on the tree.”

WILLIAM DUTHIE.

MRS. BEECHER STOWE'S "VINDICATION."*

THE explanation called for by the public from Mrs. Beecher Stowe has at length appeared. It is in the form of a book of 328 pages, published by Messrs. Sampson Low and Son; and is now in the hands of most people. The result is unsatisfactory: since of the proofs demanded from Mrs. Stowe in support of her story, none are forthcoming. Not a tittle of testamentary evidence is adduced in corroboration of Mrs. Stowe's terrible accusation; on the contrary, she has contradicted or explained away some of her first assertions. The writing in these verbose pages is of the same vague, diffuse character as was the article in "Macmillan." Failing *proof* to adduce, evidently possessing it not, Mrs. Stowe endeavours to show by argument, reasoning, and large quotations from Lord Byron's works, that he must of necessity have been guilty.

The first thing that strikes the eye as strange, is the title of the book: "Lady Byron Vindicated." Why this title should have been chosen is a puzzle. Lady Byron had not been accused by Mrs. Stowe: rather the contrary, as readers remember well: what the public wished, and demanded, was Mrs. Stowe's own vindication. A vindication of her conduct in having penned the article, and her reasons to justify it. "Lady Byron Vindicated: A History of the Byron Controversy from its beginning in 1816 to the present time," says the title of the book *in extenso*. But the history of the half-century controversy was not wanted: what we required and waited for, were the corroborative proofs of Mrs. Stowe's accusation. And she does not give them.

The book (which the reader of this paper probably possesses, and can refer to) is heralded in by an Introduction. And if we are obliged to find some fault with this Introduction, and to ask in places what it means, Mrs. Stowe must not lay the blame on us. In the course of it she says, "First, Why have I made this disclosure at all? To this I answer briefly, *Because I considered it my duty to make it.* I made it in defence of a beloved, revered friend, whose memory stood forth in the eyes of the civilized world charged with most repulsive crimes, of which I certainly knew her innocent."

Of what repulsive crimes had Lady Byron been charged? They certainly must exist alone in Mrs. Stowe's fancy. Lady Byron lived and died one of the most respected of women. Beyond what has been called her stony-hearted silence—and for this silence it was allowed she

* By the author of the paper entitled "Lord and Lady Byron," in the Octobe number of THE ARGOSY, 1869.

might have good reason ; at any rate what she thought such—not an accusation was ever breathed against her. But to return to the Introduction.

"I claim, and shall prove, that Lady Byron's reputation has been the victim of a concerted attack, begun by her husband during her lifetime and coming to its climax over her grave. I claim, and shall prove, that it was not I who stirred up this controversy in this year 1869. I shall show *who did do it*, and who is responsible for bringing on me that hard duty of making these disclosures, which it appears to me ought to have been made by others. I claim that these facts were given to me unguarded by any promise or seal of secrecy, expressed or implied ; that they were lodged with me as one sister rests her story with another for sympathy, for counsel, for defence. *Never* did I suppose the day would come that I should be subjected to so cruel an anguish as this use of them has been to me. *Never* did I suppose that,—when those kind hands that had shed nothing but blessings, were lying in the helplessness of death,—when that gentle heart, so sorely tried and to the last so full of love, was lying cold in the tomb,—a countryman in England could be found to cast the foulest slanders on her grave, and not one in all England to raise an effective voice in her defence."

This language, "foulest slanders," is very strong, utterly unjustifiable as applied to anything charged on Lady Byron. "The countryman in England" is understood to mean the writer of the article in "Blackwood's Magazine" for July, 1869. Just for the present we will leave it.

"I admit the feebleness of my plea," continues Mrs. Stowe, "in point of execution. It was written in a state of exhausted health, when no labour of the kind was safe for me,—when my hand had not strength to hold the pen, and I was forced to dictate to another. I have been told that I have no reason to congratulate myself on it as a literary effort. O my brothers and sisters ! is there then nothing in the world to think of but literary efforts ? I ask any man with a heart in his bosom, if he had been obliged to tell a story so cruel, because his mother's grave gave no rest from slander,—I ask any woman who had been forced to such a disclosure to free a dead sister's name from grossest insults, whether she would have thought of making this work of bitterness a literary success ?"

This is a strangely sensational appeal, and singularly devoid of common sense. May we dare to meet it by telling Mrs. Stowe that there *are* other things to be thought of beyond literary efforts : decorum, justice, consideration for our fellow-creatures' feelings, honest loving-kindness : and that when a damning accusation is sent forth to the world against the dead, the literary effort containing it should at least be clear and straight to the purpose, free alike from raving invective and venomous abuse. What grossest insults had Lady Byron's memory

suffered, that Mrs. Stowe should have been forced to what she aptly calls her "work of bitterness?" We in England know of none. Who has slandered the grave as she has? The Introduction goes on:

"Are the cries of the oppressed, the gasps of the dying, the last prayers of mothers,—are *any* words wrung like drops of blood from the human heart to be judged as literary efforts?"

Come, Mrs. Stowe, tell us what this means. Is it reason, or is it ranting? If it sounds like the latter to us sober-minded people, your pen must take the blame. What have the cries of the oppressed, the groans of the dying, the last prayers of mothers, to do with the question in hand? We may rely upon one thing—that two mothers, dead now, could they have foreseen that future literary effort of yours in "Macmillan's," would have prayed to you on their bended knees in dying to have mercy and be silent—Lady Byron and Mrs. Leigh.

"My fellow-countrymen in America," continues Mrs. Stowe, "men of the press, I have done you one act of justice,—of all your bitter articles, I have not read one. I shall never be troubled in the future time by the remembrance of any unkind word you have said of me, for at this moment I recollect not one." (Mrs. Stowe has just said she has not read one—but not to recollect implies that she must have read.) "I had such faith in you, such pride in my countrymen, as men with whom, above all others, the cause of woman was safe and sacred" (has Mrs. Stowe held it sacred in this self-same business?), "that I was at first astonished and incredulous at what I heard of the course of the American press, and was silent, not merely from the impossibility of being heard, but from grief and shame. . . . Have not you, every individual of you, who must hereafter give an account yourself alone to God, an interest to know the exact truth in this matter, and a duty to perform as respects that truth? Hear me then, while I tell you the position in which I stood, and what was my course in relation to it."

This is exactly what we are asking to know—the truth. But it seems that we never shall. Mrs. Stowe asserts one thing: the public assert another. She says what Lady Byron told her must be true; they answer that it was not. And there the matter virtually rests: for there can be no real proof brought forward on either side. Mrs. Stowe asks whether we have not, each individual of us, an interest to know the truth in this matter. Yes: if we could get at it; a hot interest, seeing that it involves a high dish of scandal. It is not so clear what the duty we should have to perform thereupon would be—or why the last great account which we must one day render should be brought in. In regard to this controversy, that solemn consideration seems more to concern Mrs. Stowe herself. Yet a word: when Mrs. Stowe talks of the "position in which she stood" it is enough to imply that she alone knew of the secret charge whispered by Lady Byron. But, according to her own showing, many others knew of it. English men and women

who had been nearer and dearer to Lady Byron than she ever was : how then could she think the duty of speaking lay with *her*? To proceed.

"A shameless attack on my friend's memory had appeared in the 'Blackwood' of July, 1869, branding Lady Byron as the vilest of criminals, and recommending the Guiccioli book to a Christian public as interesting from the very fact that it was the avowed production of Lord Byron's mistress. No efficient protest was made against this outrage in England. . . . When time passed on, and no voice was raised, I spoke. I gave at first a simple story" (was it?) "for I knew instinctively that whoever put the first steel point of truth into this dark cloud of slander must wait for the storm to spend itself. I must say the storm exceeded my expectations, and has raged loud and long. But now that there is a comparative stillness I shall proceed, first, to prove what I have just been asserting, and, second, to add to my true story such facts and incidents and I did not think proper at first to state."

With this ends the Introduction. It will therefore be seen that Mrs. Stowe charges the article in "Blackwood" of July last ("the shameless attack on my friend's memory") as being the cause of her penning *her* article in "Macmillan;" and this plea is continued to be urged throughout the book. Is this true? If so, how came it that in the "Macmillan" article she never once mentioned "Blackwood?" In *that* she gives the Guiccioli book, and the consequent increased circulation of Lord Byron's works to be expected thereupon, as the sole cause that induced her to speak. In this vindication Mrs. Stowe says, "You, my sisters, are to judge whether the accusation laid against Lady Byron by the 'Blackwood' in 1869 was not of so barbarous a nature as to justify my producing the truth I held in my hands in reply." Because no voice was raised in England in defence of Lady Byron—and Mrs. Stowe states that she waited for it to be raised, and was overwhelmed with grief and horror because it was not raised—then she spoke. Turning back to "Macmillan" we read: "No person in England, we think, would as yet take the responsibility of relating the true history which is to clear Lady Byron's memory." How does she reconcile the two statements?

"It has been said," observes Mrs. Stowe in one part of the Vindication, "that the crime charged on Lady Byron was comparatively unimportant, and the one against Lord Byron was deadly. But the 'Blackwood' in opening the controversy, called Lady Byron by the name of an unnatural female criminal, whose singular atrocities alone entitle her to infamous notoriety; and the crime charged upon her was sufficient to warrant the comparison. Both crimes are foul, unnatural, horrible; and there is no middle ground between the admission of the one or the other."

What crime? The worst ever charged against Lady Byron was, th

she quitted her husband without telling him why, and refused to return. Is this a foul and unnatural crime?—a one monstrous exceptional crime, she calls it elsewhere. What does Mrs. Stowe mean by this language? It would seem that she is herself casting these aspersions on Lady Byron to afford an excuse for having spoken, and because she can plead no other sufficient grounds of justification. To compare anything that could be charged on Lady Byron with what Mrs. Stowe charges on her husband is inexcusable.

"The question," proceeds Mrs. Stowe, "whether I did right, when Lady Byron was thus held up as an abandoned criminal by the 'Blackwood' to interpose my knowledge of the real truth in her defence is a serious one" (nothing more true!) "but it is one for which I must account to God alone, and in which, without any contempt of the opinions of my fellow creatures, I must say, that it is a small thing to be judged by man's judgment."

"Blackwood" did not uphold Lady Byron as an abandoned criminal. No one has done that but Mrs. Stowe. At least, nobody else says she has been so upheld. If, as Mrs. Stowe states, it is a small thing to be judged by man's judgment, why did she rush out with this dreadful story to set man and the world right?

"Let the reader mark the retributions of justice," continues Mrs. Stowe. "The accusations of the 'Blackwood' in 1869 were simply an intensified form of those first concocted by Lord Byron in his 'Clytemnestra' poem of 1816. He forged that weapon and bequeathed it to his party. The 'Blackwood' took it up, gave it a sharper edge, and drove it to the heart of Lady Byron's fame. The result has been the disclosure of this history. It is then Lord Byron himself, who by his net-work of wiles, his ceaseless persecutions of his wife, his efforts to extend his partizanship beyond the grave, has brought on this tumultuous exposure. He, and he alone, is the cause of this revelation."

Curious analogy, this. But the reader is requested to observe that Mrs. Stowe still keeps up her plea that the article in "Blackwood" was the immediate cause of her speaking. "The result" (of the article) "has been the disclosure of this history." And we want to know whether she is strictly correct in saying so. Let us see how it could have been.

The article came out in July, 1869. Allowing for the transit to America (it takes from ten days to a fortnight; as may be) Mrs. Stowe may have seen it towards the middle of the month. She says (the reader can refer back a page) "no efficient protest was made against this outrage in England, and Littell's 'Living Age' reprinted it. . . . When time passed on, and no voice was raised, I spoke."

Will Mrs. Stowe be good enough to tell us how much time passed on? Whether *any*. And how long she waited to see whether any English protest would be made? It is but reasonable to suppose that

she would at least have waited until the August periodicals were out. But before these periodicals could have reached her, her own article must have been written and actually on its way to Macmillan's in England. For Macmillan's to be enabled to print it for the September number, it could not have been despatched from the American shores much later than the first day of August. Now this is patent to everybody; on that side and on this. Where then was the waiting? The fact is Mrs. Stowe must have rushed into print in consequence of the Guiccioli book, as she at first stated: and she will perhaps forgive us for fancying that she never saw the "Blackwood" article beforehand. If this be so, in this one point at least she is not honest.

It was very convenient no doubt in the fury of the raised storm, to find so excellent an excuse to catch up and plead in extenuation of what she had done. But Mrs. Stowe's judgment is peculiar: it appears to observe with a strangely self-interested eye. To less partial readers—and many have, in consequence of this, studied the "Blackwood" article attentively—it does not present the abusive features Mrs. Stowe charges on it. Read it for yourselves, my friends; see, and judge. That the "Blackwood" article is severe upon Lady Byron is indisputable: but not as Mrs. Stowe would represent. All it urges against her is, that she did not speak. "When the separation took place," says 'Blackwood,' "the British public was seized with a hot fit of that moral ague under which John Bull becomes the maddest and most absurd of beasts. Not a crime prohibited in the Decalogue, not an abomination recorded in Holy Writ or heathen mythology, but some one was found to assert and some one else to believe, that Lord Byron had committed, nay, was in the constant habit of committing. Even the purest and tenderest affections of nature were turned to poison, into which the shafts of slander were dipped, and all this for no other reason than that his wife did not choose to live with him, and would not say why."

It is the British public who are charged here, not Lady Byron. But the article does charge her with keeping an "absolute and rigid silence," and blame her for it when she "ought to have spoken." Yet the article does justice: it quotes Lord Byron's defence of his wife in the midst of the storm—than which nothing can be more earnestly eulogistic.

"We would deal tenderly with the memory of Lady Byron: few women have been greater objects of compassion," says "Blackwood," while apportioning out to her a large amount of sharp and bitter blame. Blame only for her silence, be it always understood, and for her conduct in regard to the separation. "Lady Byron has been called 'The moral Clytemnestra of her lord': the moral 'Brinvilliers' would have been a truer designation."

Now this is the worst the article says: and this is what Mrs. Stowe is so particularly hard upon. She explains, for the benefit of her

readers, what the crimes were of these two ladies renowned in history. Clytemnestra caused her husband Agamemnon to be murdered that she might marry somebody she liked better: the Marquise de Brinvilliers, by the means of subtle poison, destroyed her father, sister, and two brothers. Had the article wished to make out that Lady Byron had been actually guilty of these crimes, Mrs. Stowe could not have made more of it. She lavishes abuse upon "Blackwood" just in the same exaggerated and frantic style, and with the same hard names, that she lavished it upon Lord Byron. "Men of America, men of England, what do you think of this?" she asks. "When Lady Byron was publicly branded with the names of the foulest ancient and foulest modern assassins, and Lord Byron's mistress was publicly taken by the hand and encouraged to go on and prosper in her slanders, by one of the oldest and most influential British reviews, what was said and what was done in England? That is a question we should be glad to have answered. Nothing was done that ever reached us across the water."

No: but then you perceive, Mrs. Stowe, England took the article, just as they did the Guiccioli book, for what it was worth, and no more: an expression of one-sided opinion on an old and worn-out subject, which could do no harm whatever to Lady Byron's memory. And in any case, you did not wait to see.

Does Mrs. Stowe believe that Lady Byron is accused of having poisoned and murdered people? If not, what can she mean by the following? "When 'Blackwood,' therefore, boldly denounces a lady of high rank as a modern Brinvilliers" (what has rank to do with it?) "and no sensation is produced and no remonstrance follows, what can people in the New World suppose, but that Lady Byron's character was a point entirely given up; that her depravity was so well-established and so fully conceded that nothing was to be said, and that even the defenders of the aristocracy were forced to admit it."

The perversion of common sense displayed in all this is so obvious, that Mrs. Stowe's cause must suffer from it more than from aught else. She does not and cannot believe that "depravity" was ever charged, even by implication, on Lady Byron. In her "Macmillan" article she admits this, when speaking of the Guiccioli book being "revamped" in magazine articles in England and America. "All this while," she says, "it does not appear to occur to the thousands of unreflecting readers that they are listening merely to the story of Lord Byron's mistress and of Lord Byron, and that even by their own showing the heaviest accusation against Lady Byron is that *she has never spoken at all*; her story has never been told."

What are we to think of this contradiction? Mrs. Stowe makes this declaration in "Macmillan"—and the italics, giving emphatic weight to it, are her own: in the Vindication book now brought forth, she asserts that it was in consequence of Lady Byron's being accused of the

foulest crimes, of the vilest slanders being heaped upon her grave, that she wrote the article in "Macmillan" to exonerate her. Which are we to believe? The inference seems to be—that she had either not then seen the "Blackwood" article, or had not imputed to its pen the venom she now does: and that it has been seized upon as a tardy and lame excuse for her own most unfortunate outbreak.

Mrs. Stowe goes on. "I have been blamed for speaking on this subject without consulting Lady Byron's friends, trustees, and family. More than ten years had elapsed since I had any intercourse with England, and I knew none of them. How was I to know that any of them were living? If there was any near relative to vindicate Lady Byron's memory, I had no evidence of the fact: and I considered the utter silence to be strong evidence to the contrary."

It has been shown that Mrs. Stowe did not wait to see. But let us pass that by. In her September article she writes as follows: "To the children left by her daughter Lady Byron ministered with the faithfulness of a guardian angel; and it is owing to her influence that those who yet remain are some of the best and noblest of mankind."

Again we must ask which we are to believe; that, or this. If Mrs. Stowe, as she now says, did not know that any of these children were living, how came she to speak of them in that laudatory way, as existing people, last September? She ought to tell us.

To resume. "In all the storm of obloquy and rebuke that has raged in consequence of my speaking, I have had two unspeakable sources of joy; first, that they did not touch *her*; and, second, that they could not blind the all-seeing God. It is worth being in the darkness to see the stars. It has been said that I have drawn on Lady Byron's name greater obloquy than ever before. I deny the charge. Nothing fouler has been asserted of her than the charges in the 'Blackwood,' because nothing fouler could be asserted. No satyr's hoof has ever crushed the pearl deeper in the mire than the hoof of the 'Blackwood,' but none of them have defiled it or trodden it so deep that God cannot find it in the day when He maketh up His jewels."

This may be fine writing in spite of its grammar—Mrs. Stowe might call it "tall"—but it is singularly out of place and purposeless. The only bit of sense and truth in it is the one sentence that she, Mrs. Stowe, has been said to have drawn down obloquy on Lady Byron's name. None existed before.

The next part is absolutely not understandable. "I have another word, as an American, to say about the contempt shown to our great people in thus suffering the materials of history to be falsified to subserve the temporary purposes of family feeling in England." What Mrs. Stowe means here, I cannot tell, and so quote on, "Lord Byron belongs not properly either to the Byrons" (does he not?) "or to the Wentworths. He is not one of their family jewels to be locked up in their

cases. He belongs to the world for which he wrote, to which he appealed, and before which he dragged his reluctant, delicate wife to a publicity equal with his own: the world has, therefore, a right to judge him."

And so on: the whole of this part is too long to transcribe, for space is not unlimited. Mrs. Stowe goes on to say that the truth of the matter between Lord and Lady Byron was wanted, and that she rose up to tell it. But Mrs. Stowe must pardon us for reminding her—as we did in THE ARGOSY article of last October—that before speaking, she should have made herself absolutely sure that what she had to tell *was* the truth.

Finally, to part with this portion touching on the "Blackwood" article, we must beg leave to retain our doubts of its having been brought within Mrs. Stowe's cognizance when she first wrote, and that therefore it could not have been, as she now alleges, the inducing cause.

The book is divided into three parts, each part containing several chapters. The titles of the chapters promise well—and are as sensational as the most inveterate scandal-reader could wish. Take the first section: "Introduction." "The Attack on Lady Byron." "Resumé of the Conspiracy." "Results after Lord Byron's Death." "The Attack on Lady Byron's Grave." Mrs. Stowe says that Lord Byron and others entered into a "conspiracy" to attack Lady Byron at the time of the separation in 1816, and that it has been going on ever since until it culminated in the Comtesse Guiccioli's book, and the article in "Blackwood." It does not quite appear who the conspirators were—or are: Mrs. Stowe should be a little more clear upon the point. To bear out her case she quotes a good deal of Lord Byron's poetry, and other matter: but anything more wildly imaginative and less in accordance with the dictates of common sense, than this notion of a conspiracy, could not have been raised. The second part consists of eight chapters—and it is in these that Mrs. Stowe professes to prove her case. The word professes is written advisedly.

When Mrs. Stowe astonished the world with her "True Story of Lady Byron's Life," corroborative proofs of it were universally called for. It was assumed that she certainly must have some, or that she never would have spoken as she did. Amidst other statements was the following, "The interview had almost the solemnity of a death-bed avowal. Lady Byron recounted the history which has been embodied in this article, and gave to the writer a brief memorandum of the whole, with the dates affixed."

Dates of what? Of Lord Byron's alleged crime and her own discovery of it? It was what we readers supposed; and naturally we concurred in asking Mrs. Stowe to furnish those dates, with the other proofs at her command.

But she has given none; neither proofs nor dates; absolutely none.

The confused vagueness that characterized the writing of the first story is not dispensed with in this. The irrelevant matter that Mrs. Stowe enters into makes the whole obscure; the main point is enveloped in a sea of fog and not much touched upon. There are letters of Lady Byron's; but they do not at all allude to the question, and are therefore worse than useless.

In the "Macmillan" article, Mrs. Stowe's account of the interview, "stated specifically," is this. "On the occasion of a second visit to England, in 1856, the writer received a note from Lady Byron, indicating that she wished to have some private confidential conversation upon important subjects, and inviting her for that purpose to spend a day with her at her country seat near London. The writer went and spent a day with Lady Byron alone, and the subject of her visit was explained to her."

In this new book the account is as follows. "I now come to the particulars of that most painful interview which has been the cause of all this controversy. My sister and myself were going from London to Eversley to visit the Rev. C. Kingsley. On our way we stopped by Lady Byron's invitation to lunch with her at her summer residence on Ham Common, near Richmond: and it was then arranged that on our return we should make her a short visit, as she said she had a subject of importance on which she wished to converse with me alone. On our return from Eversley we arrived at her house in the morning. . . . After lunch I retired with Lady Byron; and my sister remained with her friends." (Two ladies who were there.)

Which of these accounts is the true one? Did Mrs. Stowe receive the note she first spoke of, and of which she here makes no mention or did she not? It may be urged by Mrs. Stowe's friends that the difference in these minor details is of no consequence: but we beg to say that in a grave matter of this nature it *is*: of the very utmost consequence as a test of reliable accuracy.

Let us go on with the interview. "It had all the solemnity of a death-bed avowal," says Mrs. Stowe in "Macmillan"; and she "was so impressed with the whole scene and recital that she begged for two or three days to deliberate before forming an opinion." We are given to believe—still in "Macmillan"—that the various little anecdotes which impart zest to the story were spoken by Lady Byron herself at this interview, such for instance as Lady Byron's wishing herself the little spaniel at Lord Byron's room door where he was closeted with his sister when Lady Byron went to say farewell on her departure. *Now* Mrs. Stowe says they were not given to her by Lady Byron, but by a confidential friend of Lady Byron's. The details given of the wedding-day, with that most unnatural and improbable scene in the carriage when Lord Byron told her she had married a devil, was another bit of zest; but instead of having been furnished to Mrs. Stowe by Lady Byron at this

memorable interview, as we certainly were led to think, it appears now that she gathered it from a long-ago published narrative of Miss Martineau's. Mrs. Stowe now tells us that she had heard all about the alleged crime and that there was a child, from Mrs. — (the name is not stated), before she ever saw Lady Byron. Whence then arose her implied astonishment? She says: "The dates that Lady Byron gave me on the memoranda did not relate either to the time of the first disclosure or the period when her doubts became certainties" (what did they relate to, then?) "nor did her conversation touch either of these points: and on a careful review of the latter" (latter what?) "I see clearly that it omitted dwelling upon anything which I might be supposed to have learned from her already published statement. I re-enclosed that paper to her from London and have never seen it since."

What does Mrs. Stowe mean? What published statement is she talking about?—we are compelled to ask it from sheer inability to understand what is alluded to in all this. Does Mrs. Stowe herself know? the whole narrative in its essential points of explanation is so obscure that we seem to be in a cloud. Is it purposely made so? the question can but suggest itself. The public asked for confirmatory *proofs* of that interview, and especially of the statement of Lady Byron. None are given. Save that Lady Byron is made to declare the alleged crime in a broadly-expressed sentence, and that she tells of a scene between herself, her husband, and Mrs. Leigh, which was the means of first opening her eyes, we have positively no more information than we had before. Mrs. Stowe introduces a letter from the sister who accompanied her, a Mrs. M. F. Perkins; but in point of value it goes for nothing. Mrs. Stowe makes this admission: "Of course I did not listen to this story as one who was investigating its worth. I received it as truth. And the purpose for which it was communicated was not to enable me to prove it to the world" (let the public mark this) "but to ask my opinion whether *she** should show it to the world before leaving it. The whole consultation was upon the assumption that she had at her command such proofs as could not be questioned. Concerning what they were I did not minutely inquire: only in answer to a general question she said she had letters and documents in proof of her story. Knowing Lady Byron's strength of mind, her clear-headedness, her accurate habits, and her perfect knowledge of the matter, I considered her judgment on this point decisive." So it turns out after all, that Mrs. Stowe had no proof furnished to her. Her assertion in "*Macmillan*" was to the contrary. *That* consisted of these words. "By a singular concurrence of circumstances, all the facts of the case, in the most undeniable and authentic form were at one time placed in the hands of the writer of this sketch, leaving to her judgment the use which should be made

* These suggestive italics are Mrs. Stowe's.

of them." But it now seems she had only Lady Byron's word in conversation, and that the use to be made of the stated circumstances was *not* left to her.

To go through all the contradictions between the "True Story" and the "Vindication" and to point them out, would not only require a clear head but a large amount of patience, space, and paper. It cannot be done in these few pages. The whole thing teems with inaccuracy. How Mrs. Stowe can have shown herself so devoid of capability to tell a plain straight-forward tale, is a marvel. The story, taken from the first, reads just as though she had caught up a few facts, and dressed them up into a sensational tale of fiction. She makes Lady Byron affirm in the interview that she had held repeated conversations with Lord Byron on his connection with Mrs. Leigh. "She said he boldly avowed the connection as having existed in time past," relates Mrs. Stowe, "and as one that was to continue in time to come; and implied that she must submit to it." The arguments in these conversations are related, those of Lord Byron, those of Lady Byron, so that if Lady Byron might be believed there could be no doubt. These are grave assertions. Mrs. Stowe as gravely endorses them. And yet, in the teeth of this, Mrs. Stowe says further on, that the truth of the matter as regards the guilt of Mrs. Leigh did not come to Lady Byron's knowledge until *after* she left her husband's home. "The knowledge of the whole extent of the truth came to Lady Byron's mind at a later period." (This relates to February: Lady Byron left in January.) The curious thing is (adopting for an instant Mrs. Stowe's story), if Lady Byron did not know of it before she left London *who* enlightened her afterwards?

The whole case, as put by Mrs. Stowe, presents a mass of incompatible contradictions. The letters which have recently appeared, written by Lady Byron to Mrs. Leigh after the separation, must in all sane minds do away with the charge at once; at least with that one great feature of it—that Lady Byron had lived with her husband knowing what was taking place, and that she left her home in consequence. Those letters when they came out must have astounded Mrs. Stowe, for they presented a fatal stumbling-block to what she had told the world in "Macmillan." Which version does she herself believe: the one she first enlightened us with, with all its unwholesome terms and details; which she insisted upon was Lady Byron's true story, as told to herself?—or the one she relates now: that Lady Byron did not know there was anything really wrong between Lord Byron and Mrs. Leigh until some time after she had quitted him? If Mrs. Stowe now pins her faith to this latter version, how could she dare give the first to the public as "undeniable and authentic?" Her words are not forgotten. "There came an hour of revelation—an hour when in a manner that left no room for doubt—Lady Byron saw the full depth of the abyss of infamy which her marriage was expected to cover, and understood that she

was expected to be the cloak and accomplice of this infamy. Many women would have been utterly crushed by such a disclosure; some would have fled from him immediately and exposed and denounced the crime. Lady Byron did neither. She would neither leave him nor betray him, nor yet would she for one moment justify his sin. And hence came two years of convulsive struggle, in which sometimes for a while the good angel seemed to gain the ground, and then the evil one returned with seven-fold vehemence. Lord Byron argued his case with himself and with her with all the sophistries of his powerful mind." Unless Mrs. Stowe had indisputable proof that this was true, it was nothing short of a crime to send it forth as being so. Even in this fresh book she in one place repeats it, as above quoted. "Lady Byron put it to his conscience as concerning his sister's soul, and he said it was no sin, &c., &c. I immediately said, 'Why, Lady Byron, those are the very arguments used in the drama of Cain.' 'The very same,' was her reply: 'he could reason very speciously on the subject.'" And yet—the reader is begged to pardon the repetition—in the face of all this, a few pages further on, Mrs. Stowe endeavours to show by analysis that Lady Byron when she quitted her home and for some time afterwards had no suspicion of the reality of the guilt.

Was there ever contradiction like unto this?—could there be more complete casuistry? But then, you see, Lady Byron's affectionate, letters to Mrs. Leigh have appeared, and they and the story will not by any means fit into one another. There the letters are, and Mrs. Stowe had to deal with them.

That the letters present as complete a refutation to the "True Story" as any evidence can, it would be the worst of folly to deny, let Mrs. Stowe pretend as she will. Take the first of them, written to Lord Byron on the road after her departure; a playful affectionate letter, beginning "Dear Duck." Take the second, written the following day to Mrs. Leigh, "My dearest A.,—It is my comfort that you are still in Piccadilly." Take the next, written some ten days after, "Dearest A.,—I know you feel for me, as I do for you; and perhaps I am better understood than I think. You have been ever since I knew you my best comforter; and will so remain, unless you grow tired of the office—which may well be." Mrs. Stowe, to serve her own argument, may be pleased to gloss over these letters with little remark—save that the first was precisely the letter an experienced young wife would write when dealing with a husband supposed to be insane: and that Mrs. Leigh's conduct in remaining in the house must have appeared to her, Lady B., self-denying and heroic—but to readers on this side the water they are confuting, undeniable testimony. There are several more, written *after* the separation was a decided thing and Lady Byron had taken up her solitary standing for ever: all are penned in the same loving terms and begin "My dearest Augusta." If these letters are

genuine—and no doubt can be thrown upon them—then Mrs. Stowe's sensational story, of all that took place before Lady Byron quitted her home, must be false. To suppose Lady Byron would write in this manner to Mrs. Leigh, or to him, even though only a faint suspicion of their too-great intimacy had arisen in her mind, would be to brand her as a bad and deceitful woman. Mrs. Stowe may well tell us that she is accused of having brought obloquy on Lady Byron's memory.

In the chapter headed "Chronological Summary of Events," Mrs. Stowe gives five or six heads of what she calls Authentic sources; one amidst them being "Lady Byron's statements to me in 1856," and sums up thus: "From these let us construct the story." Had Mrs. Stowe been content *not* to construct a story, but to have said what she had to say (if she must needs have said it at all) simply and concisely, it had been more to her credit and England's honour. How far she has drawn on her fertile imagination—the imagination of a novelist, remember—we shall never know. But this much we do know—that her long-expected explanation contradicts in many essential points her first statement; that it gives not one iota of proof; and that it had better, even for her own side of the question, have been let alone.

Instead of the proofs demanded, the book teems throughout with false argument: false because it is not in accordance with reason, and is entirely one-sided. How unfair her premises are, let us take one instance. It is in the chapter headed "The direct argument to prove the crime." "It is fairly inferable" (says Mrs. Stowe) "from Lord Byron's own statement, that his family friends believed this charge." (How and where is it inferable? Mrs. Stowe ought to show.) "Lady Byron speaks in her statement of 'nearest relatives' and family friends who were cognisant of Lord Byron's strange conduct at the time of the separation.* It appears that there was nothing in the character of Lord Byron and of his sister, as they appeared before their generation, that prevented such a report from arising: on the contrary, there was something in their relations that made it seem probable. And it appears that his own family were so affected by it, that they, with one accord, deserted him."

Now this is neither more nor less than a wicked statement. Mrs. Stowe assumes the crime, speaks as if it were ascertained fact; she assumes that his family and friends believed it, and then adds, "they were so affected by it that they all deserted him." Which of his family—save his wife—deserted him? What evidence has Mrs. Stowe that they believed it? Who were they? To send forth these flights of supposition to the world as recorded facts, is as a very sin against the dead. An admission, that Mrs. Stowe makes further on, is rather remarkable: "Lord Byron, if we look at it rightly, did not corrupt Mrs. Leigh any more than he did the whole British public." Looking

* There is not space to quote the whole page, but the reader can refer to the book.

at the way Mrs. Leigh was corrupted, according to Mrs. Stowe's point of view, the British public of those days would not have thanked her for her opinion.

Mrs. Stowe cannot have done with it: she repeats herself a few pages further on, "The public rumour of the day specified what the crime was." (Why then need Mrs. Stowe have re-proclaimed it so many years after?) "Lord Byron's relations, joined against him. The report was silenced by his wife's efforts only." What efforts? That she went to visit Mrs. Leigh in the midst of the raised storm?—apparently this is Mrs. Stowe's meaning. If so, why then Lady Byron—knowing what Mrs. Stowe says she did know—must have been either a forgiving angel just come out of heaven, or a woman devoid of natural passions. Even though she had loved her husband with the strongest love—and it has never been pretended that she did—she could not have so made herself the ostensibly affectionate friend of his imputed sinful partner. Womanly instinct and human nature would alike have revolted from it. "It is not necessary to suppose great horror and indignation on the part of Lady Byron," cries Mrs. Stowe. "It is proved," says she, "that Lady Byron did not reveal this even to her nearest relatives. It is proved that she sealed the mouths of her counsel, and even of servants, so effectually that they remain sealed to this day." Of what servants did she seal the mouths? One of the presumptive proofs against the alleged crime is, that the servants neither suspected it nor ever hinted at it. Had the sin been of frequent commission in Lord Byron's house, as according to the "True Story" it was, the servants must inevitably have known of it. That she sealed the lips of Dr. Lushington is true: but the world, including even Mrs. Stowe, *does not know the nature of the communication made to him.*

The brain gets perplexed, the pen disheartened; from seeing the number of mistaken points in the book that ought to be noticed, and that cannot be. Had it been written with concise brevity, confining itself to facts—for of proofs there are none—it might have lain in a nutshell. The text is bewildering: taking up matters entirely irrelevant: speaking of the same thing in scattered places. That Mrs. Stowe has no head for analytical reasoning or straightforward composition, stands confessed, and she apparently forgets that she must be read by those who have. The book is as senseless a vituperation on Lord Byron as the "Macmillan" article was; the view taken as unjustly one-sided. The strangest feature in it all is, that she herself does not seem to see this. She goes blindly on: not with proof (I am tired of saying there is none), but with her own arguments, insisting on the question again and again. Because it was so-and-so, says she, the inference is that Lord Byron must have been guilty; and therefore he *was* guilty. One chapter is headed "The direct argument to prove the crime,"—but Mrs. Stowe ought to see that argument is just what cannot prove it. She assumes things to

have been as she puts them, draws her own deductions, and then expects the public to believe her. Nothing ever written in the world's history has been a more manifest failure than this book, as regards its purpose. There's not a word of answer to the many indignant letters of refutation that "Macmillan's" charge called forth, or to the valuable testimony some of them contained. There's not a word of permission, to tell the story, having been given to Mrs. Stowe. In striving to excuse herself for penning that first disgraceful statement, and to defend her article from the indignation it invoked, she has sent forth this incongruous mass of irrelevant matter to disappoint those who had a right to expect something different.

Of what use are the numerous quotations from Lord Byron's works? None. Mrs. Stowe says that because they treat of a similar sin, they prove he was guilty of it. What folly! Before taking the trouble to repeat and insist on this hypothesis, she should have learnt a lesson from the manner it had been already met. Why does she transcribe the letters to herself from Lady Byron? There are not many: it appears to us that she never had many from her: but not in one of them is there so much as a syllable that treats of the "communication" made at the interview. The first letter is taken up with remarks on the state of the English church; the others are equally foreign to the present inquiry. One observation in them is suggestive—for it tells *for* her husband, not against him. "If there is truth in what I heard Lord Byron say, that works of fiction live only by the amount of *truth* which they contain, your story 'Dred' is sure of a long life." Had Lady Byron habitually believed her husband to be the faithless man he was to her, his wife—and *so* faithless—would she have been fond of speaking of him, of quoting his words? There are also seven or eight letters from Lady Byron to Mr. Crabb Robinson, reprinted from the Robinson Diary: Mrs. Stowe alone knows why she need have introduced them. Nearly half the book is taken up with praises of Lady Byron, by implication if not directly. Scarcely a page throughout it but could be objected to and answered: the book, not the praise. The latter is all wrong though sometimes; and at best it grows wearisome. Because the "Quarterly Review" speaks of Lady Byron "running round, and repeating her story to people mostly below her own rank in life," Mrs. Stowe seeks to confute the charge by bringing in remarks made by Lord Byron on his wife some fifty years before—of her personal dignity, her high cultivation, her self-control, and her decorum. "This coarse and vulgar attack only proves the poverty of a cause which can defend itself by no better weapons: it is a fair specimen of the justice dealt out to Lady Byron," retorts Mrs. Stowe on the "Quarterly": quite losing sight of the fact that the qualities, whether good or bad, possessed by Lady Byron in her earlier days, can have no manner of relation, for or against, to the question of whether she was given to talk of her story in later ones.

The one-sided view that Mrs. Stowe betrays from first to last, can but strike the reader. Whether she so writes only to serve her own cause in self-defence, or whether she is actually incapable of judging of things with an impartial eye, it is impossible to tell: it would really seem to be the latter. It is as if a veil were before her, and she could only see with a distorted vision. Just—it was remarked at the time—as the “True Story” ought to have been sent back for revisal, so most unquestionably ought this “Vindication.” It is useless to tell a one-sided story and say to the world “You must adopt this view because I say it.” The violent rancour first displayed against Lord Byron continues here; the injudicious laudation of his wife. The book, for all practical purpose—its proclaimed purpose, that of testifying to the truth of Mrs. Stowe’s charge—need never have been written, for of testimony there is none. Long-winded arguments of her own, a vast mass of dragged in matter and people, telling nothing, quoted passages from Lord Byron’s works, vituperation of all who did, or do, espouse his cause, assertions that he must have been guilty: this may tend to make up the three hundred and twenty-eight pages; but certainly not to furnish the proofs demanded by the public. A small portion of it here and there, not necessary to be particularized, Mrs. Stowe might have had the good taste to suppress—even though her previous pains at searching it out as evidence had to go for nothing.

Finally. The book only shows with more imperative certainty the bitter mistake committed when that shameful charge was sent forth to the world, outraging public decency, ignoring good taste and feeling. One can but sit down and wonder *why* Mrs. Stowe made it. The charge, at this distance of time, can never be proved or disproved; it must be all conjecture: one party will say “it was so,” another party “it was not;” but neither can for a certainty ever know. Even though Sir Stephen Lushington were to come forward with a tardy avowal and say this was Lady Byron’s charge to me, that would not prove it to have been true, only that it was her belief. Mrs. Stowe’s motive for letting it loose on the world (we say nothing here of her judgment and manner of telling it) must ever remain a problem. In her first account she says it was done to confute the Guiccioli book, now she says it was the “Blackwood” article, and that she could but rise up in defence of her dear departed friend, her sister. This sisterly friendship is made much show of throughout: is it justifiable—or but Mrs. Stowe’s way of boasting? So far as we are enabled to judge, she does not appear to have had much intimacy with Lady Byron, or to have seen her, in all, more than a few times. Mrs. Stowe says she formed her acquaintance at a lunch party in 1853, during her first visit to England, and transcribes part of a letter, written to her by Lady B.: but we do not gather that she had any further communication with her at this period; at least, nothing of the kind is stated. “I recollect she wore a plain widow’s cap of a transparent

material," says Mrs. Stowe, speaking of the luncheon party. It may have been merely one of those simple white net caps that some ladies of quiet taste wear habitually, even in dress: if it was really a widow's cap, worn for her husband still after his nearly thirty years ago death, the fact is rather remarkable. In 1856 Mrs. Stowe visits England again, and apparently writes to ask if she may call to see Lady Byron, for an acceding note from Lady B. is given. Next come one or two extracts of letters about "Dred," a copy of which she had presented to Lady Byron. A few days subsequent to this, Mrs. Stowe, with her husband, sister, and family, was invited to take luncheon with Lady Byron. "With the unselfishness which was so marked a trait with her," says Mrs. Stowe, "she chose a day when she could be out of her room." One can but suppose this remark uncalled for: she would scarcely have invited them had she been in it. Later, Mrs. Stowe, her husband, and son spent an evening at Lady Byron's house and met some other people. It does not appear that Mrs. Stowe saw more of her this time, with the exception of the memorable interview recorded: which, she said in "Macmillan," took place in 1856, but she does not here further specify *when* as in relation to these other visits. It is a very singular omission. Later Mrs. Stowe was in England again and twice saw Lady Byron.

Not much intercourse, this: not sufficient to justify her in speaking of Lady Byron as a sister, or even an intimate friend. And we may rely upon it that Mrs. Stowe would have told us of more interviews had they taken place. Not quite sufficient, this, to justify her in taking up the cudgels for Lady Byron against the world. Remembering Mrs. Stowe's inordinate reverence for titled people, for what she calls the Aristocracy of England, one is tempted to wonder whether the publication of this most miserable story had its rise in her ambition to let the world know she had been welcomed by Lady Byron as an equal, and had secrets talked to her.

Any way, whatever may have been the prompting motive, the result has been lamentable. Whether the charge were true or false, a more humiliating one for all parties was never penned. For Mrs. Stowe herself, for the magazine that aided her, for the friends and descendants of those aspersed, for the public who had to listen to it. Mrs. Stowe's pen was dipped in venom, and her manner of story-telling caused even men's brows to flush.

After all, it does not so much concern us whether the sin ever had place, or not. Why should it? But it does concern us that this flood of impurity should have been allowed to come forth like a deluge, scandalizing society, poisoning young ears hitherto innocent. They who let it loose have it to answer for. However much Mrs. Stowe may have been respected in other respects, she is unwarrantably blamable in this. And if we cast reproach on her and point out how shallow her story is when analysed, it is not done from ill-nature but in bare jus-

tice ; for public opinion must not be speciously misled. In her eager vanity to rush into print, she forgot everything that a woman should remember. Lady Byron, nine years dead, needed no justification. Who did then ? Who wanted to be enlightened ? Not the world : it would have been better without it. Not Lady Byron's descendants : for—and Mrs. Stowe with her usual one-sided obtuseness, appears never to have glanced at the fact—if Lady Byron was their grandmother, Lord Byron was their grandfather. If to whiten (as she imagines) Lady Byron, she throws blackness upon *him*, it must be reflected on them. Mrs. Leigh's children she conveniently ignores ; but the injury dealt out to them is the cruellest of all.

Take it, for an instant's argument, at the most favourable light for Mrs. Stowe—that she spoke really to defend Lady Byron, and that the charge was true. Would it have been any justification for her ? Compare anything that could be said of Lady Byron with this dreadful tale she tells of the Honourable Mrs. Leigh. It was a cruel reprisal.

Down to the very last page of the book Mrs. Stowe's remarkable deficiency in holding the balance of judgment is displayed. She anticipates the time when she shall stand side by side with her adversaries (those in England who "allowed the barbarous assault of the 'Blackwood' to go over the civilized world without a reply") at the great judgment seat, "I to give an account for my speaking, they for their silence." Mrs. Stowe appears to think that the judgment of heaven (we would speak in all reverence) will be in her favour. She forgets which it was, they in keeping silent, or she in speaking, that wrought the mischief—the impurity, the cruelty, the evil slander that can never be redeemed. The article in "Macmillan" and this book will pass into the Past ; soon be three parts forgotten ; with time men may possibly grow to look upon them with a lenient eye. But what time will blot out the indelible accusation made ? Mrs. Stowe has enrolled it on the world's records in black and white, and there it must remain, uneffaced, for ever.

Exactly as the matter stood at first, does it stand now. Nothing new has been adduced on Mrs. Stowe's side ; somewhat against her, in the shape of Lady Byron's letters to Mrs. Leigh. Nothing more or less can be said. It was a fatal mistake to have published the "True Story," and this "Vindication" is not much less of one.

DICK MITCHEL.

IF I relate it, it's not by my own wish, but because I am told to. To my mind, there's nothing much in it to relate. "The newspapers are squabbling on the subject just now," says a gentleman to me the other day; "and as you were at the top and tail of the thing when it happened, and are well up in the subject generally, you may as well make a paper of it, Johnny." That was no other than the surgeon—Duffham.

We are at Dyke Manor this time: and you have heard before that it lay within the borders of Warwickshire, though some of its land stood in Worcestershire. Three miles off us by the high road, two by the fields, was old Jacobson's place, Elm Farm; a rambling kind of property, the house in one spot, the barns in another, and the land very good. It was not Jacobson's own; he rented it; and he had the reputation of being the best farmer for miles round.

Not to go into extraneous matter, I may as well say at once that one of the labourers on Jacobson's farm was a man named John Mitchel. He lived in a cottage near to us—a poor place of two rooms and a washhouse; but they call it back'us there—and had to walk nearly two miles to his work of a morning. Mitchel was a steady man of thirty-five, with a round head, and not any great amount of brains inside it: not but what he had as much as many labourers, and quite enough for the kind of work his life was passed in. There were six children, the eldest, Dick, ten years old; and most of them had straw-coloured hair, like their father.

Just before the turn of harvest one hot summer, John Mitchel presented himself at Mr. Jacobson's house in a clean smock frock, and asked a favour. It was, that his boy, Dick, should be taken on as ploughboy. Old Jacobson objected; saying the boy was too young and little. Little he might be, Mitchel answered, but not too young—warn't he ten? The lad had been about the farm for some time as scarecrow: that is, employed to keep the birds away, and got a shilling a week for it. Old Jacobson stood to what he said, however, and little Dick did not get his promotion.

But old Jacobson had no peace. Every opportunity Mitchel could get, or dare to use, he began again, praying that Dick might be tried. The boy was "cute," he said, strong enough also, though little; and if the master liked to pay him only fourpence a day, they'd be grateful for it: 'twould be a help, and was wanted badly. All of no use: old Jacobson still said No.

One afternoon about this time, we started to go to the Jacobsons after a one o'clock dinner, I and Mrs. Todhetly. She was fond of going over to an early tea there, but not by herself, for part of the near way across the fields was lonely. Considering that she had been used to the country, she was a regular coward as to lonely walks, expecting to see a tramp or a robber at every corner. In passing the row of cottages in Duck Lane, we saw Hannah Mitchel leaning over the footboard of her door to look after her children, who were playing near the pond in the sunshine with a lot more; quite a heap of the little reptiles, all badly clad and as dirty as pigs. Other labourers' dwellings stood within hail, and the children seemed to spring up in the place thicker than wheat; Mrs. Mitchel's was quite a small family, reckoning by comparison. But how the six got clothed and fed was a mystery, out of Mitchel's wages of ten shillings a week. It was thought good pay. Old Jacobson was liberal, as farmers go. He used to give all his labourers a stunning big joint of home-fed fresh pork at Christmas, with fuel to cook it: and his wife was good to the women when they fell sick.

Mrs. Todhetley stopped to speak. "Is it you, Hannah Mitchel? Are you pretty well?"

Hannah Mitchel stood upright and dropped a curtsey. She had a covered-up bundle in her arms, which proved to be the baby, then not much above a fortnight old.

"Dear me! it's very early for it to be about," said Mrs. Todhetley, touching its little red cheeks. "And for you too."

"It is, ma'am: but what's to be done?" was the answer. "When there's only a pair of hands for everything, one can't afford to lie by long."

"You seem but poorly," said Mrs. Todhetley, looking at her. She was a thin, dark-haired woman, with a sensible face. Before she married Mitchel she had lived under nurse girl in a gentleman's family, where she picked up some idea of good manners.

"I be feeling a bit stronger, thank you," said the woman. "It don't come back to one in a day, ma'am."

The Mitchel children were sidling up, attracted by the sight of the lady. Four young grubs in tattered garments.

"I can't keep 'em decent," said the mother, with a sigh of apology. "I've not got no soap nor no clothes to do it with. They come on so fast, ma'am, and make such a many, one after another, that it's getting a hard pull to live anyhow."

Looking at the children; remembering that, with the father and mother, there were eight mouths to feed, and that the man's wages were the ten shillings weekly all the year round and no more, Mrs. Todhetley might well give her assenting answer with an emphatic nod.

"We was hoping to get on a bit better," resumed the wife; "but

Mitchel he says the master don't seem to like to listen. A'most a three week it be now since Mitchel first asked it him."

"In what way better?"

"By a putting little Dick to the plough, ma'am. He gets a shilling a week now, he'd get two then, perhaps three, and 'twould be such a help to us. Some o' the farmers gives fourpence halfpenny a day to a ploughboy, some as much as sixpence. The master, he bain't one o' the near ones, but Dick be little of his age, he don't grow fast, and Mitchel telled the master he'd take fourpence a day and be thankful for't."

Thoughts were crowding into Mrs. Todhetley's mind—as she mentioned afterwards. A child of ten ought to be learning and playing; not working from twelve to fourteen hours a day.

"It would be a hard life for him."

"True, ma'am, at first; but he'd get used to it. I could have wished the summer was coming on instead o' the winter—'twould be easier for him to begin upon. Winter mornings be so dark and cold."

"Why not let him wait until the next winter's over?"

The very suggestion brought tears into Hannah Mitchel's eyes. "You'd never say it, ma'am, if you knew how bad his wages is wanted and the help they'd be. The older children grows, the more they wants to eat; and we've got six of 'em now. What would you, ma'am?—they don't bring food into the world with 'em; they must help to earn it for theirselves as quick as anybody can be got to let 'em earn it. Sometimes I wonder why God should send such large families to us poor people."

Mrs. Todhetley was turning to go on her way, when the woman in a timid voice said, Might she make bold to ask, if she or Squire Todhetley would say a good word to Mr. Jacobson about the boy: that it would be just a merciful kindness.

"We should not like to interfere," replied Mrs. Todhetley. "In any case I could not do it with a good heart: I think it would be so hard upon the poor little boy."

"Starving's harder, ma'am."

The tears came running down her cheeks with the answer; and they won over Mrs. Todhetley.

Crossing the high, crooked, awkward stile—over which, in coming the other way, if people were not careful they generally pitched over with their noses into Duck Lane mud—we found ourselves in what was called the square paddock, a huge piece of land, ploughed last year. The wheat had been carried from it only this afternoon, and the gleaners in their cotton bonnets were coming in. On, from thence, across other fields and stiles. We went a little out of our way to call at Glebe Cottage—a small white house that lay back amidst the fields—and enquire after old Mrs. Parry, who had just had a stroke.

Who should be at Elm Farm, when we got in, but the surgeon, Duff-

ham : come on there from paying his daily visit to Mrs. Parry. He and old Jacobson were in the green-house, looking at the grapes : a famous crop they had that year ; not quite ripe yet. Mrs. Jacobson sat at the open window of the long parlour, making a new jelly-bag. She was a pleasant-faced old lady, with small flat silver curls and a net cap.

Of course they got talking about little Dick Mitchel. Duffham knew the boy ; seeing that when a doctor was wanted at the Mitchels', it was he that went. Mrs. Todhetley told exactly what had passed : and old Jacobson—a tall, portly man of sixty, with a healthy colour—got nearly purple in the face, disputing.

Dick Mitchel would be of as good as no use for the team, he said, and the carters put shamefully upon those young ones : in another year the boy would be stronger and bigger, perhaps he'd take him then.

"For my part, I cannot think how the mothers can like their poor boys to go out so young," cried the old lady, looking up from her flannel bag. "A ploughboy's life is very hard in winter."

"Hannah Mitchel says it has to be one of two things—early work or starving," said Mrs. Todhetley. "And that's pretty true."

"Labourers' boys are born to it, ma'am : and so it comes easy to 'em, as skinning does to eels," cried Duffham, quaintly.

"Poor things, yes. But it is very hard upon the children. The worst is, all the labourers seem to have no end of them. Hannah Mitchel has just said she sometimes wonders why God should send so many to poor people."

It was an unfortunate remark. To hear the two gentlemen laugh, you'd have thought they were at a Christmas pantomime. Old Jacobson brought himself up in a kind of passion.

What business, in the name of all that was imprudent, had these poor people to have their troops of children ? he asked. They knew quite well they could not feed them ; that the young ones would be three parts starved in their earlier years, and then come to the parish and be a burden on the community. Look at this same man, Mitchel. His grandfather, a poor miserable labourer, had a troop of children ; Mitchel's father had a troop, twelve, *he* ; Mitchel had six, and seemed to be going on fair to have six more. There was no reason in it. Why couldn't they be content with a moderate number, three or four, that might get a chance of being found room for in the world ? It was not much less than a crime for these men, next door to paupers themselves, to launch their tens and their dozens of boys and girls into life, and then turn round and say, Why does God send them ? Nice kind of logic, that was.

And so he kept on, for a good half hour, Duffham helping him. *He* brought up the French peasantry : saying our folks ought to take a lesson from them. You don't see whole flocks of children over there, cried Duffham. One, or two, or at most three, would be found to

comprise the number of a family. And why? Because the French were a prudent race. They knew there was no provision for superfluous children; no house-room at home, or food, or clothing; and no parish, pay to fall back upon: they knew that however many children they had they must provide for them: they didn't set up, of themselves, a regiment of little famishing mouths, and then charge it on heaven: they were not so reckless and wicked. Yes, he must repeat it, wicked; and the two ladies listening would endorse the word if they knew half the deprivation and the sufferings these poor small mortals were born to; he saw enough of it, having to be often amidst 'em.

"Why don't you tell the parents this, doctor?"

Tell them! returned Duffham. He *had* told them; told them till his tongue was tired.

Any way, the little things were grievously to be pitied, was what the two ladies made answer.

"I've often wished it was not a sin to drown the surperfluous little mites as we do kittens," wound up Duff.

One of the ladies dropped the jelly-bag, the other shrieked out, Oh!

"For their sakes," he added. "It's true, upon my word and honour. Of all wrongs the world sees, never was there a worse than the one inflicted on these inoffensive helpless children by the parents, in bringing them into it. God help the little wretches! man can't do much."

And so they talked on. The upshot was, that old Jacobson stood to his word, and declined to make Dick Mitchel a ploughboy yet awhile.

We had tea at four o'clock—at which fashionable people may laugh; considering that it was the real tea, not the sham one come lately into custom. Mrs. Todhetley wanted to get home by daylight, and the summer evenings were shortening. Never was brown bread-and-butter so sweet as the Jacobsons': we used to say it every time we went; and the home-baked rusks were better than Shrewsbury cake. They made Mrs. Todhetley take two or three in her bag for Hugh and Lena.

Old Duff went with us across the first field, turning off there to take the short cut to his home. It was a warm, still, lovely evening, the sun setting, the yellow moon rising. The gleaners were busy in the square paddock: Mrs. Todhetley spoke to some as we passed. At the other end, near the crooked stile, two urchins stood fighting, the bigger one trying to take a small armful of wheat from the other. I went to the rescue, and the marauder made off as fast as his small bare feet would carry him.

"He haven't gleaned hisself and wants to take mine," said the little one, casting up his big gray eyes to us in appeal through the tears. He was a delicate-looking pale-faced boy of nine, or so, with light hair.

"Very naughty of him," said Mrs. Todhetley. "What's your name?"

"It's Dick, lady."

"Dick—what?"

"Dick Mitchel."

"Dear me—I thought I'd seen the face," said Mrs. Todhetley to me. "But there are so many boys about here, Johnny; and they all look pretty much alike. How old are you, Dick?"

"I'm over ten," answered Dick, with an emphasis on the over. Children catch up ideas, and no doubt he was as eager as the parents could be to impress on the world his fitness in years to be a ploughboy.

"How is it that you have been gleaning, Dick?"

"Mother couldn't, 'cause o' the babby. They give me leave to come on since four o'clock: and I've got all this."

Dick looked at the stile and then at his bundle of wheat, so I took it while he got over. As we went on down the lane, Mrs. Todhetley inquired whether he wanted to be a ploughboy. Oh yes! he answered, his face lighting up, as if the situation offered some glorious prospect. It 'ud be two shilling a week; happen more; and mother said as he and Totty and Sam and the t'others 'ud get treacle to their bread on Sundays then. Apparently Mrs. Mitchel knew how to diplomatize.

"I'll give him one of the rusks, I think, Johnny," whispered Mrs. Todhetley.

But while she was getting it from the bag, he ran in with his wheat. She called to him to come back, and gave him one. His mother had taken the wheat from him; she looked out at the door with it in her hands. Seeing her, Mrs. Todhetley went up, and said Mr. Jacobson would not at present do anything. The next minute Mitchel appeared, pulling at his straw hair.

"It is hard lines," he said humbly, "when the lad's of a' age to be a earning, and the master can't be got to take him on. And me to ha' worked on the same farm, man and boy; and father afore me."

"Mr. Jacobson thinks the boy would not be strong enough for the work."

"Not strong enough, and him rising eleven!" exclaimed Mitchel, as if the words were some dreadful aspersion on Dick. "How can he be strong if he gets no work to make him, ma'am? strength comes with the working—and nobody don't oughtent to know that better nor the master. Anyhow, if he *don't* take him, it'll be cruel hard lines for us."

Dick was outside, dividing the rusk with a small girl and boy, all three seated in the lane, and looking as happy as if they had been children in a fairy tale. "It's Totty," said he, pausing in the work of division to speak, "and that un's Sam." Mrs. Todhetley could not resist the temptation of finding two more rusks; which made one apiece.

"He is a good-natured little fellow, Johnny," she remarked as we went along. "Intelligent too: in that he takes after his mother."

"Would it be wrong to let him go on the farm as plough-boy?"

"Johnny, I don't know. I'd rather not give an opinion," she added,

looking right before her into the moon, as if seeking for one there. "Of course he is not old enough or big enough, practically speaking: but on the other hand, where there are so many mouths to feed, it seems hard not to let him earn money if he can. The root of the evil lies in there being so many mouths—as was said at Mr. Jacobson's this afternoon."

It was winter before I heard anything more of the matter. Tod and I were away, and only got home for Christmas. One day in January when the skies were lowering and the air cold with a raw coldness, but not frosty, I was crossing a field on old Jacobson's land, then being ploughed. The three brown horses at the work were as fine as you'd wish to see.

"You'll catch it smart on that there skull o' yourn, if ye don't keep their yeads straight, ye little divil."

The salutation was from the man at the tail of the plough to the boy at the head of the first horse. Looking round, I saw little Mitchel. The horses stopped and I went up to him. Hall, the ploughman, took the opportunity to beat his arms. I daresay they were cold enough.

"So your ambition is attained, is it, Dick! Are you satisfied?"

Dick seemed not to understand. He was taller, but the face looked pinched, and there was never a smile on it.

"Do you like being ploughboy?"

"It's hard and cold. Hard always; frightful cold of a morning."

"How's Totty?"

The face lighted up just a little. Totty weren't any better, but she didn't die; Jimmy did. Which was Jimmy?—oh, Jimmy was after Nanny, next to the babby.

"What did Jimmy die of?"

Whooping-cough. They'd all been bad but him—Dick. Mother said he'd had it when he was no older nor the babby.

"Whether the whooping-cough had caused an undue absorption of Mitchel's means, certain it was, Dick looked famished. His cheeks were thin, his hands blue.

"Have you been ill, Dick?"

No, he had not been ill. 'Twas Jimmy and the t'others.

"He's the incapablest little villain I ever had put me to do with," struck in the ploughman, stilling his arms to speak. "More lazy nor a fattening pig."

"Are you lazy, Dick?"

I think an eager disclaimer was coming out, but the boy remembered in time who was present—his master, the ploughman.

"Not lazy wilful," he said, bursting into tears. "I does my best: mother tells me to."

"Take that, you young sniveller," said Hall, dealing him a good

sound slap on the left cheek. "And now go on : ye know ye've got this lot to get through to-day."

He caught hold of the plough, and Dick stretched up his poor trembling hands to the first horse to guide him. I am sure the boy *was* trying to do his best: but he looked weak and famished and ill.

"Why did you strike him, Hall? He did nothing to deserve it."

"He don't deserve nothing else," was Hall's answer. "Let him alone, and the furrows 'ud be as crooked as a dog's leg. You dun' know what these young 'uns be for work, sir.—Keep 'em in the line, you fool!"

Looking back as I went down the field, I watched the plough going slowly up it, Dick seeming to have his hands full with the well-fed horses.

"Yes, I heard the lad was taken on, Johnny," Mrs. Todhetley said when I told her that evening. "Mitchel prevailed with his master at last. Mr. Jacobson is good-hearted, and knew the Mitchels were in sore need of the extra money the boy would earn. Sickness makes a difference to the poor as well as to the rich."

I saw Dick Mitchel three or four times during that January month. The Jacobsons had two nephews staying with them from Oxfordshire, and it caused us to go over often. The boy seemed a regular weak little mite for the place: but of course, having undertaken the work, he had to do it. He was no worse off than others. To be at the farm before six o'clock, he had to leave home at half-past five, taking his breakfast with him, which was mostly dry bread. As to the boy's work, it varied—as those acquainted with the executive of a busy farm can tell. Besides the ploughing, he had to pump, and carry water and straw, and help with the horses, and go errands to the blacksmith's and elsewhere, and so on. Carters and ploughmen do not spare their helping boys: and on a large farm like this they are the immediate rulers, not the master himself. Had Dick been under Mr. Jacobson's personal eye, perhaps it might have been lightened a little, for he was a humane man. There were three things that made it seem particularly hard for Dick Mitchel, and those three were under nobody's control: his natural weakness, his living so far off the farm, and its being winter weather. In summer the work is nothing like as hard for the boys; and it was a great pity that Dick had not first entered on his duties in that season to get inured to them against the winter. Mr. Jacobson gave him the best wages—three shillings a-week. Looking at the addition it must have seemed to Mitchel's ten; it was little wonder he had not ceased to petition old Jacobson.

The Jacobsons were kind to the boy—as I can testify. One cold day when I was over there with the nephews, shooting birds, we went into the best kitchen at twelve o'clock for some pea-soup. They were going to carry the basins into the parlour, but we said we'd rather eat

it there by the blazing big fire. Mrs. Jacobson came in. I can see her now, with a soft white woollen kerchief thrown over her shoulders to keep the cold off, and her net cap above her silver curls. We were getting our second basinsfuls.

"Do have some, aunt," said Fred. "It's the best you ever tasted."

"No thank you, Fred. I don't care to spoil my dinner."

"It won't spoil ours."

She laughed a little, and stood looking from the window into the fold-yard, saying presently that she feared the frost was going to set in now in earnest, which would not be pleasant for their journey.—For this was the last day of the nephews' stay, and she was going home with them for a week. There had been no very sharp cold all the winter: which was a shame because of the skating: if the ponds got a thin coating of ice on them one day, it would be all melted the next.

"Bless me! there's that poor child sitting out in the cold! What's he eating?—his dinner?"

Her words made us look from the window. Dick Mitchel had stuck himself down by the far-off pig-sty, and seemed to be eating something that he held in his hands. He was very white—as might be seen even from where we stood.

"Mary," said she to one of the servants, "go and call that boy in."

Little Mitchel came in; pinched and white and blue. His clothes were thin, not half warm enough for the weather, an old red woollen comforter was twisted round his neck. He took off his battered drab hat, and put his bread into it.

"Is that your dinner?" asked Mrs. Jacobson.

"Yes 'm," said Dick, pulling the forelock of his light hair.

"But why did you not go home to-day?"

"Mother said there were nothing but bread, and she give it me to bring away with my breakfast."

"Well, why did you sit down out in the cold? You might have gone indoors somewhere to eat it."

"I were tired 'm," was all Dick answered.

To look at him, one would say the "tired" state was chronic. He was shivering slightly all over with the cold; his teeth chattered. Mrs. Jacobson took his hand and put him to sit on a low wooden stool close to the fire, and gave him a basin of the pea-soup.

"Let him have more if he can eat it," she said to Mary when she went away. So the boy for once got well warmed and fed.

Now, it may be thought that Mrs. Jacobson, being a kind old lady, might have told him to come in for some soup every cold day. And perhaps her will was good to do it. But it would never have answered. There were boys on the farm besides Dick, and no favour could be shown to one more than another. No, nor to the boys more than to the men. Nor to the men on one farm more than to the men on

another. Old Jacobson would have had his brother farmers pulling at his ears. Those acquainted with the subject will know all this.

And there's another thing I'd better say. In telling of Dick Mitchel, it will naturally sound like an exceptional or isolated case, because those who read have their attention directed to this one and not to others. But, in actual fact, Dick's was only one of a great many; the Jacobsons had employed ploughboys and other boys always, lots of them; some strong and some weak, just as the boys might happen to be. For a young boy to be out with the plough in the cold winter weather, seems to a farmer and a farmer's men nothing: it lies in the common course of events. He has to get through as he best can; he must work to eat; and as a compensating balance there comes the genial warmth and the easier work of summer. Dick Mitchel was but one of the race; the carter and ploughman, his masters, had begun life exactly as he did, had gone through the same ordeal, the hardships of the long winter's day and the frost and snow. Dick Mitchel was as capable of his duties as many another had been. Dick's father had been little and weakly in his boyhood, but he got over that and grew as strong as the rest of them. Dick might have got over it, too, but for some extraordinary weather that came in.

Mrs. Jacobson had been in Oxfordshire a week when old Jacobson started to fetch her home, intending to stay there two or three days. The weather since she left had been going on in the same stupid way; a thin coating of snow to be seen one day, the green of the fields the next. But on the morning after old Jacobson started, the frost set in with a vengeance, and we got our skates out. Another day came in, and the Squire declared he had never felt anything to equal the cold. We had not had it as sharp for years: and then, you see, he was too fat to skate. The best skating was on a pond on old Jacobson's land, which they called the lake from its size.

It was on this second day that I came across Dick Mitchel. Hastering home from the lake-pond after dark—for we had skated till we couldn't see and then kept on by moonlight—the skates in my hand and all aglow with heat, who should be sitting by the bank on this side the crooked stile instead of getting over it, but little Mitchel. But for the moon shining right on his face, I might have passed without seeing him.

"You are taking it airily, young Dick. Got the gout?"

Dick just lifted his head and stared a little; but didn't speak.

"Come! Why don't you go home?"

"I'm tired," murmured Dick. "I'm cold."

"Get up. I'll help you over the stile."

He did as he was bid at once. We had got well on, down the lane, and I had my hand on his shoulder to steady him, for his legs seemed

to slip about like Punch's in the show, when he turned suddenly back again.

"The harness."

"The what?" I said.

Something seemed the matter with the boy: it was just as if he had partly lost the power of ready speech, or had been struck stupid. I made out at last that he had left some harness on the ground, that he was ordered to take to the blacksmith's.

"I'll get over for it. You stop where you are."

It was lying where he had been sitting: a short strap with a torn buckle. Dick took it and we went on again.

"Were you asleep, just now, Dick?"

"No, sir. It were the moon."

"What was the moon?"

"I were looking into it. Mother says God's all above there: I thought happen I might see Him."

A long explanation for Dick to-night. The recovery of the strap seemed to have brightened up his intellect.

"You'll never see Him in this world, Dick. He sees you always."

"And that's what mother says. He sees I can't do more nor my arms 'll let me. I'd not like Him to think I can."

"All right, Dick. You only do your best always: He won't fail to see it."

I had hardly said the last words when down went Dick without warning, face foremost. Picking him up, I took a look into his eyes by the moon's light.

"What did you do that for, Dick?"

"I don't know."

"Is it your legs?"

"Yes it's my legs. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it when I fell under the horses to-day, but Hall he beated of me and said I did."

After that I did not loose him; or I'm sure he would have gone down again. Arrived at his cottage, he was for passing it.

"Don't you know your own door, Dick Mitchel?"

"It's the strap," he said. "I ha' got to take it to Cawson's."

"Oh I'll step round with that. Let's see what there is to do."

He seemed unwilling, saying he must take it back to Hall in the morning. Very well, I said, so he could. We went in at his door: and at first I thought I must have got into a black fog. The room was a narrow poking place; but I couldn't see to the other end of it. Two children were coughing, one choking, one crying; Mrs. Mitchel's face, ornamented with blacks, gradually loomed out to view through the atmosphere.

"It be the chimbley, sir. I hope you'll please to excuse it. It don't smoke as bad as this except when the weather's cold beyond common."

"It's to be hoped it doesn't. I should call it rather miserable if it did."

"Yes, sir. Mitchel, he says he thinks the chimbley must have frozed."

"Look here, Mrs. Mitchel, I've brought Dick home: I found him sitting in the cold on the other side of the stile yonder, and my belief is, he thought he couldn't get over it. He's about as weak as a young rat."

"It's the frost, sir," she said. "The boys all feels it that has to be out and about. It'll soon be gone, Dick. This here biting cold don't never last long."

Dick was standing against her, bending his face on her old stuff gown. She put her arm about him kindly.

"No, it can't last long, Mrs. Mitchel. Couldn't he be kept indoors until it gives a bit—let him have holiday? No! Wouldn't it do?"

She opened her eyes wide at this, braving the cloud of flying blacks. Such a thing, as keeping a ploughboy at home for a holiday, had never entered her imagination at its widest range.

"Why Master Ludlow, sir, he'd lose his place!"

"But, suppose he were ill, and had to stay at home?"

"Then the Lord help us, if it came to that! Please, sir, his wages might be stopped. I've heard of a master paying in illness, though it's not many of 'em as would, but I've never knowed 'em pay for holiday. The biting cold 'll go soon, Dick," she added, looking at him; "don't ye be downhearted."

"I should give him a cup of hot tea, Mrs. Mitchel, and let him get to bed. Good night; I'm off."

I'd have liked to say beer instead of tea; it would have put a bit of strength into the boy; but I might just as well have suggested wine, for all they had of either. Leaving the strap at the blacksmith's—it was but a minute or two out of my road—I told him to send it up to Mitchel's as soon as it was done.

"I daresay!" was what I got in answer.

"Look here, Cawson: the lad's ill, and his father was not in the way. If you don't choose to let your boy run up with that, or take it yourself, you shall never have another job of work from the Squire if I can prevent it."

"I'll send it, sir," said Cawson, coming to his senses. Not that he had much from us: we mostly patronised Dovey, down in Piefinch Cut.

Now all this happened: as Duffham and others could testify if necessary; it's not put in to make up a story. But I never thought worse of Dick than that he was done over for the moment with the cold.

Of all days in remembrance, the next was the worst. The cold was more intense—though that had seemed impossible; and a fierce wind

was blowing that cut you in two. It kept us from skating—and that's saying a good deal. We got half way to the lake-pond, and couldn't stand it, so turned home again. Jacobson's team was out, braving the weather, for I saw it at a distance. In the afternoon, when a good hot meal had put warmth into us, we thought we'd be off again; and this time gained the pond. The wind was like a rough knife: I never skated in such before: but we kept on till dusk.

Going homewards, in passing Glebe Cottage, which lay away on the left, we caught sight of three or four people standing before it.

"What's to do there?" asked Tod of a man, expecting to hear that old Mrs. Parry had got a second stroke.

"Sum'at's wrong wi' Jacobson's plough-boy," was the answer. "He have just been took in there."

"Jacobson's plough-boy! Why, Tod, that must be Dick Mitchel."

"And what if it is!" returned Tod. "The youngster's half frozen, I dare say. Let's get home, Johnny. What are you stopping for?"

By saying "half frozen" he meant nothing. Not a thought of real ill was in his mind. I went up to the house; and met Hall the ploughman coming out of it.

"Is Dick Mitchel ill, Hall?"

"He ought to be, sir; if he baint shamming," returned Hall, crustily. "He have fell down five times since noon, and the last time wouldn't get up upon his feet again nohow. Being close a-nigh the old lady's, I carried of him in."

Hall went back into the house with me. I don't think he liked much the boy's looks. Dick had been put to lie on the warm brick floor before the kitchen fire, a blanket on his legs, and his head on a cushion. Mrs. Parry was ill in bed upstairs. The servant looked a stupid young country girl, seemingly born without wits.

"Have you given him anything?" I asked her.

"Please, sir, I've put the kittle on to bile."

"Is there any brandy in the house?"

"*Brandy!*" the girl exclaimed with wonder. No. Her missis never took nothing stronger nor tea or water gruel.

"Hall," I said, looking at the man, "somebody must go for Mr. Duffham. And Dick's mother might as well be told."

Bill Leet, a strapping young fellow standing by, made off at this, saying he'd bring them both. Hall went away to his waiting team, and I stooped over the boy.

"What is the matter, Dick? Tell me how you feel."

Except that he smiled a little, he made no answer. His eyes, gazing up into mine, looked dim. The girl had taken away the candle, but the fire was bright. As I took one of his hands to rub it, his fingers clasped themselves round mine. Then he began to say something, with a stop between each word. I had to bend down close to catch it.

"He—brought—that—strap."

"All right, Dick."

"Thank—ee—sir."

"Are you in any pain, Dick?"

"No."

"Or cold?"

"No."

The girl came back with the candle and some hot milk in a tea-cup. I put a tea-spoonful into Dick's mouth. But he could not swallow it. Who should come rushing in then but Jones the constable, wanting to know what was up.

"Well, I never!—why that's Mitchel's Dick!" cried Jones, peering down in the candle-light. "What's took *him*?"

"Jones, if you and the girl will rub his hands, I'll go and get some brandy. We can't let him lie like this and give him nothing."

Old Jones, liking the word brandy on his own score, knelt down on his fat gouty legs with a groan, and laid hold of one of the hands, the girl taking the other. I went leaping off to the Jacobsons'.

And went for nothing. The cellar was locked up, and no brandy could be got at. The cook gave me a bottle of gooseberry wine; which she said might do as well if hotted up.

Duffham was over the boy when I got back, his face long, and his cane lying on the ironing-board. Bill Leet had met him half way, so no time was lost. He was putting something into Dick's lips with a teaspoon—perhaps brandy. But it ran the wrong way; out, instead of in. Dick never stirred, and his eyes were shut. The doctor got up.

"Too late, Johnny," he whispered.

The words startled me. "Mr. Duffham! No?"

He looked into my eyes, and nodded YES. "The exposure to-day has been too much for him. He is going fast."

And just at that moment Hannah Mitchel came in. I have often thought that the extreme poor, whose lives are but one vast hardship from the cradle to the grave, who have to struggle always, do not feel strong emotion: at any rate, they don't show much. Hannah Mitchel knelt down and looked quietly at the white and shrunken face.

"Dicky," she said, putting his hair gently back from his brow; which had now a damp moisture on it. "What's amiss, Dicky?"

He opened his eyes at the voice and feebly lifted one hand towards her. Mrs. Mitchel glanced round at the doctor's face; and I think she read the truth there. She gathered his poor head into her arms, and let it rest on her bosom. Her old black shawl was on, her bonnet fell backwards and hung from her neck by the strings.

"Oh, Dicky! Dicky!"

He lay still, looking at her. She gave one sob and choked the rest down.

"Be he dying, sir?—ain't there no hope?" she cried to Mr. Duffham, who was standing in the blaze of the fire. And the doctor just moved his head for answer.

There was a still hush in the kitchen. Her tears began to fall down her cheeks slowly and softly.

"Dicky, wouldn't you like to say 'Our Father?'"

"I—'ve—said—it—mother."

"You've always been a good boy, Dicky."

Old Jones blew his nose; the stupid girl burst out in a sob. Mr. Duffham told them to hush.

Dick's eyes were slowly closing. The breath was very faint now, and came at long intervals. Presently Mr. Duffham took him from his mother, and laid him down flat, without the cushion.

Well, he died. Poor little Dicky Mitchel died. And I think, taking the wind and the work into consideration, that he was better off.

Mr. Jacobson got back the next day. He sharply taxed the ploughman with the death, saying he ought to have seen the state the boy was in on that last bitter day, and have sent him home. But Hall declared he never thought anything ailed the boy, except that the cold was cutting him more than ordinary, just as it was everybody else.

The county coroner came over to hold the inquest. The jury, after hearing what Mr. Duffham had to say, brought it in that Richard Mitchel died from exposure to the cold during the recent remarkable severity of the weather, not having sufficient stamina to resist it. Some of the local newspapers took it up, being in want of matter that dreary season. They attacked the farmers; asking the public whether labourers' children were to be held as of no more value than this, in a free and generous country like England, and why they were made to work so young by such hard and wicked task-masters as the master of Elm Farm. That put the master of Elm Farm on his mettle. He retorted by a letter of sharp good sense; finishing it with a demand to know whether the farmers were expected to club together and provide meat and pudding gratis for the flocks of children labourers chose to gather about them. The Squire read it aloud to everybody as the soundest letter he'd ever seen written.

"I'm afraid their view is the right one—that the children are too thick on the ground, poor things," sighed Mrs. Todhetley. "Any way, Johnny, it's very hard on the young ones to have to work as poor little Dick did; late and early, wet or dry: and I'm glad for his sake that God has taken him."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THE BOAT RACE.

WHICH is it to be, Oxford or Cambridge? Will Oxford pull the race through once more? or will Cambridge, redoubling her former efforts, land herself a magnificent winner in what is sure to be a magnificent contest?

These, and such as these, are the questions that everybody is asking of everybody else; and which nobody in the world can possibly answer. We are all peering into an invisible future; trying to comprehend at present, what, at present, is incomprehensible. Any attempt, then, to describe the ordinary doings of the heroes of the hour will not, perhaps, be uninteresting—especially to those who watch the coming race with the eyes of practical artists.

For any one to be a member of his University Eight, a degree of physical endurance is necessary, such as would almost astonish the man ere he had put himself to the task. What has to be endured, what has to be overcome, few can possibly guess, except those who have either rowed themselves, or have made themselves intimately acquainted with the daily routine of river life. That hale, hearty, robust fellow, trudging along yonder bank, is quite unfit for a position in the boat. He looks strong enough to be sure; but, somehow, he is just devoid of that which is most essential, namely—dogged pluck. True, he has weight enough, strength enough, power enough; but what we must call “persevering endurance,” this, and this only, is wanting. Considering, however, that it is just this that makes the difference—that it is just this that is the sure forerunner of a sure victory—is it wonderful that every endeavour must be made to seek out this one quality in combination with all the others? It is this endurance which is so successful with everything connected with labour—mental and physical—and which “Britishers” (as our American cousins call us) possess in so marked a manner. Yet, strange to say, the remark is constantly recurring that, in a comparison of the two styles, there has been more or less of an absence of this “doggedness” in the Cambridge crew; and that what Cambridge has for some years past attempted, is, to make trial between elegance and determination. Up to now, the latter has obtained the victory: what the future will bring us we cannot predict. One thing, however, is certain: Cambridge has never been so strong before; and if she takes hold of the occasion presented, we may, after many years of patient waiting, have to congratulate her on nobly performing what is sure to be a noble task.

As regards the selection of the crew, this is, of course, a matter of the greatest difficulty and importance. The unfortunate President—fortu-

nately a thorough autocrat—has sometimes to bear the brunt of much ill-natured criticism. Where there are so many so good, it requires the greatest nicety of discrimination to determine who is to be rejected, who retained. Indeed, were not the Presidential authority as potent, in its little way, as the Czar's, there would be no end, literally, to the discussions and disappointments that must inevitably ensue. Nothing would be settled in definite time; everything would be delayed till talk had spent itself. It was only the other day that Mr. Bright, in the course of his speech at Birmingham, said "that the advances of Government, under existing conditions, were necessarily slow." We can all add our little testimony, and say that sometimes they are not always sure. However good, severe and lengthy discussion may be, the House of Commons has not to work against time—the Oxford President has. Hamper him with committees, and there would be an end to anything like the good feeling that generally exists now. His own judgment is all he has to guide him in his choice—and by the choice, once made, he must abide. However rabid the attack, or however fierce, only one course is open to him—thorough reliance on his own decision. This gone, and all respect is lost. How that choice is made we will now describe.

In the autumn or October term, each College and Hall sends up, for trial, every fairly efficient oarsman it may claim as a resident member—men, in fact, who are fit and proper—or to use the parliamentary phrase—*homines discreti et idonei*. In this way, the cream of all College clubs passes directly under the Presidential eye. The merits and the shortcomings of all are well noted; much careful consideration and anxious thought is expended; the result of all which is, a choice of sixteen men to row in, what are technically called, "The Trial Eights." It is from these Eights that the men who generally appear at Putney, are selected.

At the beginning of the following term, arrangements are completed as far as is practicable. Some old member of the University, who has done battle long ere this on the London water, gives the new men the benefit of his assistance and advice; and on Ash Wednesday in each year, the training of the crew commences. People, generally, labour under the notion that this training consists in demolishing raw steak and under-done mutton and beef; but this is not the case. One man prefers his food one way, and has it; another man prefers his food another way, and his taste is gratified also: both, of course, being limited by certain restrictions. How the raw meat notion ever came into vogue is not easy to determine; but the belief, that what is thoroughly indigestible must be an inevitable article of training food, only needs expression to refute itself. The real truth is, that mutton and beef are, of course, the staple of athletic, as of all other existence; and if there be an occasional supply of fish or fowl—always allowable—his last is held in the light of a luxury, and treated accordingly.

The crew, from its first meeting at breakfast on Ash Wednesday morning, to its final appearance at Putney, is always more or less together. They meet at breakfast, on the river, and at dinner; and weary work it sometimes is, this perpetual sameness in people, food, and exercise. We have only to picture eight sturdy men, with eight varying dispositions, continually obliged to enjoy each other's society, to become aware how laborious it must oftentimes be to a man of sensitive nature. It must be admitted, however, that the occasions are rare indeed when any murmuring is heard in this warrior-camp; and it is due to the Presidents to say, that they have hitherto performed their work in the most admirable fashion. The after-dinner fun is as boisterous, as noisy, and as boyish as you like; everything is "couleur de rose;" the world is faultless. A "tubbing" at six; a hard run at seven; a huge breakfast at eight; a "punishing row" at two and at three; a dinner at six, and bed at ten—this is the rowing man's life. It is monotonous, but not easy.

Such, then, is the analysis of the working of an University crew, the result of all which creates so much excitement and admiration among English-speaking countries. That Englishmen in general, and that University men in particular, should feel justly proud of the courage, endurance, and skill that is yearly exhibited, is a matter of no great wonder. The real wonder is, how, in what people are pleased to call the national sport of horse-racing, such rascality is allowed to remain unchecked. The crowds at the Derby and at the Boat-race are said to be about equal in numbers. In the one we know, for certain, that honesty does exist. Are we equally sure about the honesty in the other? Mr. Boucicault, in a recent play, has made sad havoc with an Oxford stroke-oar's manly honour; but general laughter has been enough to disprove the existence of any such enormity. Might we write this with equal truth in respect of "Turf Morality"? Our readers had better answer for themselves. The discussion hardly belongs to the present paper.

And here it is that a question arises which must be answered at once. It has often been said that in the University race, this exhibition of the moral virtues is magnificent indeed—but that "it is produced just at the expense of young men's blood!" For ourselves we may distinctly reply that such is not the case. The harm does not lie in the practice *per se*, but with those who are wilfully ignorant as to how to practise. Training can do no one harm, provided there be a careful recollection of what the individual system is capable. No single accident has ever occurred which may be directly traced to the row against Cambridge. When disasters have happened—and there is no blinking the fact—they have been attributable to two main causes. The chief of these is this. Men incautiously imagine that, after six weeks' hard training, they may disport, revel, and luxuriate at will. Consequently, you see them, the day

after the boat-race, forgetting their former condition ; living at once on the fat of the land ; keeping late hours ; and, in a word, conducting themselves sometimes, though rarely, in their most extravagant and reckless manner. That such a mode of life is baneful to the constitution there can be no doubt. Liberty we might well allow ; but what is liberty to an ordinary man, is, to an athlete, at this juncture, a positive licence.

Another cause of injury is the plan of semi-training. One of the greatest Oxford oarsmen of to-day—Mr. Carter—has repeatedly maintained that a system of strict regularity one day, and irregularity the next, is about as perilous as anything can well be. "And this," he says, "applies with especial force to men who make up the ordinary college crews at the University. Instead of rendering themselves thoroughly fit for the pinching contest they have to endure, they rely, in many cases, on their normal condition and the shortness of the course." How potent this remark is, and of how much weight, coming, as it does, from such a source, need not be added here. It is, however, of great value when viewed in connection with the great race on the Thames. We have stated before that no single accident can be traced distinctly to the row at Putney, but there is no doubt that accidents are invariably happening to rowing men. Perhaps Mr. Carter has solved the problem at last. At any rate, what he says bears a show of reason on the surface of it, and seems likely enough to be a chief, if not the main, cause for the disasters that are so frequently occurring. If too—and this is by no means a rare case—the individual merits of a crew are unproportioned, and we find a man or so unable to work up to the standard of his colleagues, the amount of labour thrown necessarily on the capable and willing horses has of course material effect on the constitutions and health, unless such have been tempered and tried by the most careful and patient training. That this is not always the case nobody, we feel certain, would venture to dispute.

If men would only be sufficiently careful, the outcry against athleticism would never be heard. If this paper has the smallest influence in deterring them from practices as unwise as they are injurious, the writer will not have written in vain. Whatever the result of the year's race may be, we wish, if we may dare say so, Cambridge every success. The hard Fate that has hung over her for so long ought now to be appeased ; and if skill and judgment can do it she now commands both. No victory, however, can be satisfactory unless the best men carry away the laurels—and with this, we are sure, all must agree.

W. B.

R É N É E.

By JULIA KAVANAGH.

THE road from Manneville to Fontaine is very beautiful, but it is also very lonely. On either side of it grow tall oaks, between which you see soft green slopes, where cows are grazing quietly, or broad fields, full of yellow waving corn; but neither farmhouse, nor homestead, nor blue smoke curling above thatched roofs half hidden by orchards of apple trees, do you once behold along its track. A sort of solitude is ever there; not the grand old solitude of Nature's making, but her milder daughter, that other solitude which meekly bears the traces of man's yoke.

Along that road a peasant lad of twelve years old or so, was walking on a hot summer's day some years back. He had curly fair hair, a fresh and merry face, bright as a sunbeam, a quick look, and a frank happy smile. He was very cleanly though very poorly dressed, but he wore his blue blouse, faded by many a washing, with as jaunty an air as if it had been a prince's garment. His little cloth cap was set on one side on his head, and gave him quite a saucy look; and he stepped along the hot sunny road as lightly as though this burning summer's noon were fanned by the freshest breezes of early spring.

Suddenly he stood still. From a field of corn on his right hand rose a girlish voice singing the old and beautiful Advent hymn, "Adeste Fideles," in tones so sweet and clear that the boy listened like one entranced, whilst the voice went on pouring forth its sweet music, filling that summer landscape with the joyful praises of the Lord.

"I must see who it is," thought the lad, "I did not know there was such a bird as that in all Manneville." He lightly leaped across the ditch which divided the road from the cornfield, then creeping along the tall wheat, he stole softly in the direction of the voice till he could see its owner. He saw a very small girl about his own age as he thought, whom he recognized at once as the daughter of a weaver, whose tumble-down old house stood not far from his mother's cottage. She was sitting in the grass outside the cornfield, and the long stick ending in a bunch of fluttering rags which she held in her right hand, told the lad her occupation. She was too small and too weak for other labour, so she sat there the whole day long to keep away from the ripening corn bold and hungry little sparrows, or such foraging hens as might stray from distant farmyards in search of booty. She was a very little creature, very demure and grave, with a small pale face, wistful dark eyes, and very dark hair. She wore a little close-

fitting black cap, according to the fashion of the country, and it added to the weird-like look of her little wan face. Her other garments were plain and poor enough indeed, but, as the boy knew from previous observation, strangely neat and precise in their cut and fashion. She now sat with her head so turned that she could not see the lad, who crouched low in the grass, and kept as quiet as he well could in order not to startle her. He hoped, indeed, that she would finish the hymn without detecting him, but a daring cock made his appearance in the pasture field: deliberately he strutted towards the corn. The girl waved her stick, and at once perceived the boy's head and staring eyes peeping up above the grass. In vain he dived down; it was too late; she ceased singing that very moment. The boy, feeling discovered, sat up, and there was a pause, during which the pair looked at each other very gravely.

"I wish you would go on," at length said the lad.

To this request the little girl gave no sort of answer, but continued looking at him with the immoveable countenance of a young sphinx.

"I wish you had not seen me," he resumed, after waiting in vain for a reply. "You have a beautiful voice; oh! so beautiful!"

The little girl shook her rod at a chattering flock of sparrows, but remained mute.

"I know you," he continued, nothing daunted, "we live close to each other, but I never hear you sing. Indeed, I never hear you talk at all. I said to my mother the other day: 'The weaver's little girl is dumb.'"

On hearing this, the young songstress smiled, and showed the lad two rows of pretty little white teeth.

"Do go on," he entreated, "I will look another way if you like; but oh, do go on."

His looks and tones expressed so great a longing to hear her, that the little maiden relented, and without saying a word again broke forth into song. She finished the "Adeste Fideles," and, unasked, she began another hymn. This she sang through, still in the same clear beautiful voice, which would have made any music enchanting, but which, when giving utterance to the grand old tunes that have been for ages on the lips of worshipping generations, sent the boy to the seventh heaven. His laughing lips quivered with emotion, and his saucy eyes grew so dim that the blue sky, the yellow corn, and the little singer herself all vanished from his sight in a mist. But this was soon over. The little girl got tired of singing, and the boy, stepping through the grass, coolly sat down by her side, and opened a conversation, in which information leading to questioning played a prominent part.

"My name is Louis Picard. What is yours? Rénée Deschamps. I like Rénée. And so you have lost your mother. My father is dead, too. He was a tailor. Yours is a weaver, I know; I have seen him at his loom. My mother is a dressmaker. We are from Fontaine, you

know. We came to Manneville six months ago, because rent is cheaper here. I am to be a tailor, my mother says. I hate it. You would not like to be a tailor, would you? Of course not. What are you to be? Nothing. You are too weak. Why, how old are you?"

"Sixteen," answered *Rénée*.

On hearing this reply *Louis* started. Could this little creature so pale, so thin, really be four years his elder? He looked into her face, and he saw that there was no childishness in it. A grave young face it was, rather sad, indeed, and there was something womanly, too, about the little slender figure—that tiny frame in which dwelt the clear beautiful voice.

"Why do I never hear you sing at home?" suddenly asked *Louis*.

"I never sing unless when I am out and alone," answered the girl. "My father does not like to hear me."

Youth is quick in jumping at conclusions. The weaver's saturnine countenance, *Rénée's* sad looks, a sound of subdued weeping which he had heard one evening from their house, helped *Louis* to build up a little story, unhappily not wide from the truth, of which *Rénée* was the poor illused heroine. He looked at her with sad wonder. That dainty young bird, whose song was so sweet in his ears, found no favour in the eyes of its owner, and could not even warble its song in its rude cage! *Louis* made no comment, but shook his head over *Rénée's* hard lot, then talked of other things.

"You know the old schoolmaster," he remarked, with a kindling look, "well, he has got a piano and I am to see it. Perhaps he will let you see it also." This half promise *Rénée* received with much calmness, yet *Louis* pursued with unabated enthusiasm, "Then there is the church organ, which is so old that no one can play on it now."

"My mother heard it," interrupted *Rénée*.

"Did she! well."

Louis looked breathless, but *Rénée*, shaking her head demurely, implied unutterable things.

"Oh! I have heard the organ in Fontaine," said *Louis*, "but still I shall like to see this one, and the schoolmaster is to take me up to the gallery; perhaps he will take you, too."

This time *Rénée* looked interested. And so *Louis* talked and *Rénée* listened, and she sang again, and the hours went on, and *Louis*, who was going to Fontaine, on an errand for his mother, and who was to come back to Manneville as quickly as his feet could carry him, spent the best part of that summer day with *Rénée*, and when they parted the two friends agreed to meet the next day.

The church of Manneville was very old, and bore tokens of those remote days when Manneville—now a poor Norman village—played its part in feudal story. Its stained glass windows sent many a glorious tint of purple and azure on the mutilated effigies of knights and abbots

resting in calm sleep on their stone beds; and though its lofty organ was mute now, and never helped forth the solemn "Te Deum" or the joyful "Gloria," its rich brown oak and many tall tubes bore witness to the munificent piety which raised it more than two hundred years ago. Manneville had been very proud of its organ once. It had gloried in its grand music; it had boasted of it when Fontaine and other towns and villages scarcely knew what an organ was; and now that ruthless Time had silenced this old friend, Manneville, though it could boast no more, was tenacious of that past glory. That the organ of Manneville had been the best of organs, that its voice had been the most powerful and yet the sweetest and clearest which ever organ had, was a settled article of belief with every son and daughter of Manneville, but with none more so than with the old schoolmaster, who, on a sunny summer evening, a week after the first meeting of Louis and *Rénée*, took them both up the dark stone staircase in order to show them the inner mechanism of the instrument. *Rénée* was too much awestruck to utter a word, but Louis was all ardour and curiosity, and the old man, who had been the last organist in Manneville, answered him very willingly. His head was white as snow, his face was covered with wrinkles, his body was bent, his step was unsteady; but between him and the boy of twelve there was the strong link of a common passion—music.

"Oh! how fine it must have been," said Louis, with a sigh of regret, "how very fine!"

"Fine!" echoed the old schoolmaster, in his thin, quavering voice. "I should think so! You never heard anything like it—never! Do not tell me of the organ of Fontaine," he added, testily; "I have heard it, and I say it was nothing to ours, and for twenty years and more I played upon it, and this was an organ indeed, and those were times for Manneville."

He half closed his eyes, and let the past come back to him in its dim glories of music, and taper, and incense. Yes, those were times for Manneville, when its organ could still speak, and its organist was not the lonely, widowed, and white-haired schoolmaster, but a man, happy, young, and strong, with a pretty, rosy wife and two laughing children—all three now sleeping soundly in the green churchyard of Manneville.

Rénée, too, thought of the past, and peeping down into the empty church below, she wished she could have heard that wonderful creature, the organ, of which her mother had so often told her, and which Louis raved about. Then, childlike, she wandered from this thought to other thoughts. A little bird had flown into the church, and was now hopping from bench to bench with a gravity of bearing which amused *Rénée*. She watched it till it flew away through the broken pane of a remote window; then she looked down once more. The

quiet church was now full of sunshine, streaming in through the open door, pouring its red gold on the broken stone floor, and creeping up to the altar steps as if it, too, wished to worship and fling its gorgeous radiance there in silent adoration.

Louis, more practical, was wondering, in the meanwhile, whether that dead past would know no second birth.

"And can the organ never be played upon again?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, by all means," replied the schoolmaster, with cutting sarcasm, "when Manneville has three thousand francs to spend upon it!"

Rénée clasped her hands on hearing the enormous sum mentioned, but Louis, nothing daunted, said again—

"Could not you play if I were to attempt to blow the bellows?"

The schoolmaster's lip quivered as he said, "The Sunday after my last child was buried, the organ went wrong. I have never played on it since then, and I never shall. Come down, children."

"If you please," persisted Louis, "I should like so to hear *Rénée's* voice in the church. May she sing?"

The schoolmaster, who had heard the boy talk of *Rénée's* wonderful voice, and who felt some curiosity to hear her, gave the required permission, and *Rénée*, after a little coaxing from Louis, was persuaded to sing that most musical of anthems, the "*Salve Regina*." Every one knows how much finer even a fine voice sounds when it is heard under the arched roof of a church. *Rénée's* voice now sent Louis into an ecstasy, and even the old schoolmaster was moved to the very heart by the sweet, clear notes which the little maiden poured forth. But scarcely had she got half through the anthem when she ceased abruptly, and, with a pale scared face, looked at a stern middle-aged man, who stood in the gloomy doorway of the staircase. He beckoned to her silently, and though trembling with fear, *Rénée* followed him out without saying a word.

"That is *Rénée's* father!" exclaimed Louis, full of dismay; "how unlucky that he should have come back so early from Fontaine! Do you think he will beat *Rénée*, sir?"

The schoolmaster shook his head. The weaver had the name of being a very hard man, and it was much to be feared that *Rénée* would not escape scatheless. Louis was to take his first lesson in music on the schoolmaster's old cracked piano that night; but for all that, his heart felt like lead within his breast, as he thought of *Rénée's* trouble.

Madame Picard was sitting alone that evening, thinking how hard it was to get dresses to make in a poor place like Manneville, and what a trouble it was to be the mother of a boy who would learn music—What for, good heavens?—and who hated being a tailor, when her cottage door opened, and in walked her neighbour, the weaver.

Jean Deschamps was a man of few words. Civility was not his amiable weakness. Sharply and curtly he delivered his errand, standing

near the door all the time. Madame Picard's Louis and his Rénée had been holding private meetings in the fields, in the church even, everywhere, in short, and he, Rénée's father, forbade it now, once for all.

On coming to settle in Manneville, Madame Picard had resolved to agree with every man, woman, and child in it, and to endorse every possible statement, opinion, and theory she might hear broached. She now turned up her eyes in horror, at the tale the weaver delivered, and clasping her hands, thanked her neighbour; but would he not sit down?—she could not realize it yet. Perhaps he would explain? Jean Deschamps came for war, and he found peace. He came prepared to drive his enemy into the last corner of maternal love, and she held up such a white flag of truce that he must needs hold a parley. He took the proffered chair, and condescended to explain.

"You see, Madame Picard," he said, "I do not want Rénée to sing. The creature is weak enough and good for little, but if she sings, all her strength will go out in her voice, and she will be good for nothing. Besides, I hate singing, music, and all those noises."

Madame Picard looked admiringly at the weaver. That was the way to rear a child, of course it was! Oh! if he would only tell her, a poor widowed woman, how to manage her unruly boy! Jean Deschamps gazed kindly at the widow. He thought her a sensible woman, that he did; and, having heard her case, he advised a good caning as the surest means of giving Louis a proper liking for a tailor's craft, and especially as the best cure of that mania for music—a sin second only to Rénée's singing. Madame Picard received this humane suggestion with an admiring gratitude, which convinced the weaver that she was not merely a wise woman, but the wisest of women. As he left her that evening, after partaking of a drop of brandy with her, and went back to the house where Rénée was crying herself to sleep, Jean Deschamps had already conceived a project, which became known to Manneville a fortnight later, when the banns of his marriage with Madame Picard were read from the pulpit. And thus it came to pass, that Louis and Rénée, who had been forbidden to meet, now lived in the same house; that Rénée learned dress-making with her stepmother, and that Louis became a weaver under his stepfather's tuition; but that singing and music were more prohibited than ever.

The opportunities for disobedience were, unfortunately, very few. Louis was kept so close to the loom that there was no getting at the schoolmaster's piano, and it was only now and then on a Sunday afternoon that Rénée and he could go out together.

Side by side, the two children, for Rénée was little more than a child, wandered out into the country till they reached some shady *cavée* or some lonely field, where only the birds in the tree could hear them. Then they both sat down, and Rénée would sing to her friend, charming his heart away with the heavenly music of her fresh young voice. These

were divine moments for the boy. As he lay in the grass looking at the sky, as he saw the tender and golden green of the sunlit trees quivering on that background of soft azure, and listened to *Rénée*, his very soul seemed to float away with the little white clouds that sailed across those fields of blue air. Sometimes, conquered by the passion of melody, he would fling himself on his face and hide the tears of delight which he could not check; but oftener than all, for Louis though impassioned was also strong, he would close his eyes, shut out even the fair aspects of Nature, and give himself up calmly to a born musician's most perfect happiness. For though no one knew it, not even Louis himself, a great gift slept within the peasant boy's breast. There are "many mansions" in Art as well as in Heaven. Some are as kings or creators in the world of sweet sounds, calling them forth and giving them life; others are only worshippers, who listen and admire, and even of these "Many are called, and few are chosen." It is a rare gift to feel the beauty of anything in its fulness, and a rarer gift still is it to love that thing with all the passion of a human heart. Even *Rénée*, though she had a correct ear, had not so keen or perfect an appreciation of her own singing as Louis who only listened to her. She sang as any little bird might sing, happily and carelessly.

When she was tired, her society was none the less acceptable to Louis; for she became as mute as a young mouse, and listened to his dreams of the future as he planned them out for her benefit. "When I am a man I shall do as I like, of course," Louis would say, "and then I shall take lessons from the schoolmaster and learn music on his pianoforte; then I shall write to the Minister, or to the Emperor, or to some one, and get the money to put the organ of Manneville to rights; then I shall become the organist. Eh! *Rénée*." And little *Rénée* would nod and smile. But the very first of these "thens" never came to pass; for the schoolmaster died, and his poor old cracked piano was sold to a lady in Fontaine, and with his own eyes Louis saw it taken away in a cart.

"No more jingling, now," sarcastically said the weaver.

Louis felt the taunt as it was intended that he should feel it—in his very heart. He was about sixteen when this misfortune occurred, and whether because the blow was so great that he required consolation, or because he was tall, strong, and as manly-looking as if he had been twenty, Louis suddenly took it into his head to make love to *Rénée*, who was as little, as slight, and almost as pale as ever.

It was on a Sunday afternoon, whilst the weaver was safe at the café, and the pair, who had stolen out into the fields, were sitting side by side in the shadow of a green hedge, that Louis, to whom *Rénée* had been singing with her heavenly voice, remarked, coolly:

"When you are my wife, *Rénée*——"

"What!" cried *Rénée*, with a start.

"Well, do you want to marry any one else, now?" he asked, sharply.

"That is not it, Louis; but think how much older I am than you are."

"Are you bigger, and stronger, and taller, too? Come, Rénée, you would not go and marry any one else, when you know all I have borne for your sake. Why, I should have run away long ago if it were not for you."

Rénée knew that, and felt silenced. Besides, she was a meek little thing, and always did Louis' bidding. Moreover, she knew how he doated on her voice. How could she give that voice to another? So she made no further objection when Louis pursued:

"When you are my wife, and I am organist of Manneville, we shall have a house of our own, of course, and I shall have a piano, and you shall sing——"

"A pretty tune I shall make you both sing, too, you young scapegraces!" cried a wrathful voice behind the hedge, above which the weaver's head soon appeared. How he had seen them and stolen after them, Louis could not imagine, but there he was, forbidding the banns. He would have done more if he had dared, but Louis was too strong and sturdy now to be struck, and what was more, he looked as if it might be dangerous to lay a finger on Rénée in his presence. So the weaver, keeping safe behind the hedge, ordered Rénée home forthwith, and when she had obeyed silently, he turned to Louis, and said sarcastically:

"You cannot marry Rénée without you mother's consent till you are twenty-five—a long time to wait, Louis: nine years. You can learn how to play on the organ in the meanwhile." And chuckling to himself, he walked away.

"Learn how to play on the organ? ay, and that I will," muttered Louis between his set teeth, "and sooner than you think, too."

For the sake of his mother, who lived in wholesome dread of her stern husband, Louis had been a tolerably dutiful step-son, but he now felt roused to revolt, and the very next week war began. During that week, Louis and Rénée had been lectured and scolded daily. The nine years which French law exacted from Louis before he could marry Rénée without the consent of his mother and, in reality, of his step-father, for the poor woman had no will of her own, seemed all too brief to that bitter-minded old gentleman. He hated his step-son, and if he did not turn him out of the house forthwith, it was for the sake of his earnings at the loom; so he made up in worrying, what he could not take out of Louis in more substantial ill-usage. But at the end of a week, the weaver made a discovery which filled him with the direst wrath. He bided his opportunity, and one night as the church clock of Manneville was striking twelve, he went up to his daughter's room, entered it abruptly, and found Rénée sitting up by her window, and looking out on the moonlit road, above which chill autumn mists were floating.

"Why are you up and dressed at this hour?" he asked, sternly.

Rénée could not answer—her fear was so great when she saw her father standing before her, with the flickering light of a tallow candle shining on his harsh face.

"And where is Louis?" he continued. "Out; gone to Fontaine to take lessons from the organist, and you sit up to let him in, do you! Well, you need not. I shall let him in to-night, and settle accounts with you, *Rénée*, to-morrow."

He vanished, locking the door outside, and leaving *Rénée* half dead with fear, not for herself, but for Louis. Suddenly a bright thought struck her. She climbed up on a chest of drawers, opened a little case—ment above it, crept out through it, and lightly jumped down on a landing. Then she stole downstairs to the garden, and whilst her father was watching at the front door, she crept out through a gap in the hedge into the open country. She was soon on the high road, walking towards Fontaine in order to meet and warn Louis.

Never before in all her life had *Rénée* been out so late, and being but a timid little thing, she felt very much afraid. It was all so lonely, so silent, and so solemn in the pale moonlight. Then it felt so chill, too, and those white mists which hung above the fields, made *Rénée*'s blood flow more slowly in her veins, and seemed to freeze the very marrow in her bones. She walked up and down to keep herself warm, then, feeling tired, she sat down on the lowest step of a wayside cross, and waited there in vain; the moon waned, the sky broke with the grayness of early dawn, and Louis came not. They had missed each other! Whilst *Rénée* was stealing out of the garden, Louis had come home along the road, but not receiving her usual signal, he had, instead of coming to the house, stolen into a neighbouring shed, where he was now fast asleep on a bundle of straw.

Poor *Rénée*, who had not the comfort of knowing this much, stole home. Cold and heartsick, she got back to her room without having been missed; but her's was the severest cost of that night's work, for when her father came to unlock her room the next morning, he found *Rénée* lying on her bed in a burning fever, unable to move or to speak.

Rénée lay for a month between life and death, and when she recovered, her beautiful voice was gone. Louis was the first whom she told of this, and she added, as a matter of course:

"And I think, Louis, that as my voice is gone, you had better tell my father that you give me up, and perhaps he will let you learn music in peace."

"And so you thought it was for your voice that I liked you?" cried Louis, in hot indignation.

Yes, *Rénée* had thought that; and seeing that she was loved for her own sake, she felt too happy for one moment, but the next she could not help saying:

"Oh! Louis! how shall we manage?"

Death settled that question; for soon after Rénée's recovery the mother of Louis died. At once the youth's resolve was taken. He would go away; go and try his fortunes, and come back and be organist of Manneville, and marry Rénée if she would only wait for him. Rénée raised her soft dark eyes to his.

"I shall wait for you till I die," she said.

The weaver would have tried to keep Louis, just to vex and thwart him, if the young man had not gone away without saying a word to any one save Rénée. He vanished from the house one morning, and after a while Rénée felt as if he had vanished out of her life. No one knew whither he was gone, no one knew what he was doing, no one had seen or met Louis, or heard of him, till, two years after his departure, a report reached Manneville, that Louis Picard had died in one of the Paris hospitals. It was the weaver who told Rénée, with a low chuckling laugh. She heard, but did not believe him. When we love and are young, the being we love wears a charm against all harm. Death, which can lay whole kingdoms waste, and level nations in the grave has no power over the beloved one of a young heart.

"It is not true, it cannot be true; Louis is not dead," Rénée said to herself, not merely on that day, but on every day that followed it for weeks and months; but as time passed and brought no tidings from the absent one, Rénée sank into that dull apathy which is twin sister to despair. Louis had been gone four years, when his enemy, the weaver, was found dead in his bed one morning, by his poor little daughter. It was a cruel shock, and the sorrow it inflicted was not lessened by a discovery Rénée made after the funeral. In looking over her father's possessions, she found the fragment of a letter addressed to herself by Louis, but what the purport of the letter had been, and whether it had been written before or after the report of his death, there was nothing to show. All Rénée's wounds bled afresh as she held the mutilated letter in her hand. Was Louis living or dead, had he forgotten her, or would he come back some day? Who could tell! not Rénée surely, only one thing she knew.

"I will wait for him till I die," she said to her own heart, as she put the letter away. It is the lot of many women to wait so; and Rénée, meek and trusting, bore her fate with silent patience. She never spoke of the hope that lived within her. She never complained that her youth was wasting away in this lonely vigil for one who seemed to have forgotten her; she never even uttered his name, but she lived alone in her father's old tumble-down house, tenderly keeping the memory of the past in her faithful heart. And thus her life was passing slowly and heavily, when there occurred an unexpected event to break its monotony.

Rénée was coming home one evening from her day's work, for Manne-

ville is faithful to the old custom of having its dresses made at home, when she found with much surprise, a strange woman sitting on the threshold of her dwelling, and evidently waiting for her.

"Are you *Rénée Deschamps*?" asked the stranger, who was middle-aged, sharp-tongued, and sharp-eyed.

"That is my name," answered *Rénée*, meekly.

"Well, you are little," said the stranger, emphatically; "open the door will you? I am tired waiting here."

Rénée did as she was bid. She felt perplexed and amazed, and a wild hope fluttered at her breast. Was this imperative stranger bringing tidings of her long-lost *Louis*? But no, her visitor soon dispelled the illusion.

"I am your aunt *Marie*," she said, sitting down at once. "I quarrelled with your father on your poor mother's wedding-day, and we never made it up. Well, he is dead now, poor fellow. Hearing you were alone, I came to see you, or rather," she added, casting the contemptuous look of a town woman on *Rénée's* bare country home, "to take you away with me to *Rouen*, where I live, as you know."

Rénée was startled, frightened, and yet pleased. Perhaps she might hear something of *Louis* in *Rouen*! So she accepted her aunt's proposal, and went away with her the next morning.

Madame Reux was a childless widow. She had a little income on which she could keep a servant that would be willing to work and expect no wages. Such a prize she hoped to secure in *Rénée*, who, being meek and humble, and having never had a will of her own, yielded to her aunt's wishes without demur. Yet, even *Rénée* soon found that she had exchanged freedom for servitude, a home for a prison. *Madame Reux* lived in a dark and dingy lane, in a dismal old house where *Rénée* felt smothered for want of air. *Madame Reux* said that the twilight which reigned in her home was the best thing in the world for weak eyes, and rejoiced over the absence of bright sun and blue sky. Both were intercepted by a dead wall facing her windows. This was the back of a convent, which was, however, poor *Rénée's* only comfort, for on a Sunday morning, the full tones of an organ rose from its little chapel, filling *Rénée's* heart with mingled sorrow and delight. The sounds of that organ, the first which she had ever heard, were *Rénée's* only link with that past of which she had hoped to find some token in *Rouen*. No one knew anything about *Louis Picard* in that large city, no one had ever heard of the peasant boy who was to become the organist of *Manneville*.

Rénée was pining away like a bird in her cage, when her aunt luckily got tired of seeing her little pale face and sad eyes.

"Go back to *Manneville*, my dear," she said to her, at the end of six months. "You have bad health, and the money I have spent on

your journey here has been wasted; but you have seen Rouen and enjoyed yourself, and I don't grudge it."

Rénée might have replied that she had seen the dead wall of the convent and heard its organ, but she was a meek little soul, and took her aunt's generosity as granted.

The autumn day was cold and still when Rénée alighted from the diligence in Fontaine, and prepared to walk on alone to Manneville. The road was bleak and very lonely, but Rénée's heart felt lighter than it had felt for many a day. Only once it sank within her. She was passing by the field where Louis had found her scaring birds away from the corn, and heard her singing the "Adeste Fideles." Brown and bare was that field now. No yellow corn was ripening in the summer sun. No little pilfering birds had to be frightened away; no humming-bee was rifling the wild thyme in the pasture field; no happy, singing Rénée, no delighted, listening Louis was there now; far as she looked, Rénée only saw the naked, furrowed earth stretching away before her. Thus, too, was her life—her life so young still, but from which brightness, pleasure, and song had departed. So Rénée thought, forgetting that the seed of another harvest was ripening beneath that brown earth, and that thus, too, it might yet be with her.

The grayness of twilight was settling on Manneville as Rénée approached it. She saw the old church on the hill, and little lights twinkling here and there around it; but though Rénée looked wistfully at the village, she shunned its steep main street, and took a quiet lane which led her to her own house in the fields. She met no one on her way, and when she entered the dwelling in which her youth had been spent, when she struck a light and kindled a little crackling fire of rape stalks, and sat down looking at it, Rénée, though at home once more, felt that sense of loneliness upon her which comes to us when we have left the dead behind us, and must needs journey on through life without them.

Still, Rénée was young, and to youth many things are pleasant. The sun shone so brightly the next day, the sky was so clear and blue, that Rénée felt cheerful as she looked into the fields—all white with the night's frost. This was Sunday, too, and when the familiar Manneville bells came pealing on the air, Rénée's heart had a throb of gladness. She liked that old church dearly, and had never found in all Rouen one that she liked half so well. Neither Notre Dame nor Saint Ouen could make Rénée forget her early love.

"Thank God to be at home once more!" she said to her own heart, as she took her seat on the old bench where she had sat since she could remember. It was early, and the church was empty still, but Rénée liked that. She wanted to pray quietly, and collect her thoughts before the congregation came in. She was kneeling, and had closed her eyes, feeling, perhaps, that she could not well help being a little

distracted at seeing all the well-known faces around her, when mass began. It began, and with it there pealed through the church, clear, deep, and strong, the voice of the long silent organ.

If *Rénée* did not start up and utter a cry, it was because the very excess of her surprise kept her motionless and mute. But she shook from head to foot, and felt in a trance of amazed delight. If the test of music be in its power over a human heart, never surely was there music out of heaven like that to which *Rénée* listened then. She hid her face in her hands and let happy, grateful tears, flow through her little fingers. In the meanwhile, the organ poured forth its glorious tide of sound, now triumphant, now pathetic, now solemn and tender; and, what with the music and the delight of knowing that Louis had come back, for she did not doubt it one moment, *Rénée* felt that perfect bliss which life grants to few, and to those few but rarely.

And now mass was over, the organ was hushed, and the congregation poured out. *Rénée* shyly lingered as long as she could, till the church was well nigh empty, then she rose and slowly walked out. The ordeal she had wished to delay was waiting for her beneath the church porch, for she reached it, at the same time with Louis, who had just left the vestry, and was still flushed with the joy and pride of his triumph. All the little world of Manneville was gathered on the place outside, and stood there looking on at the meeting of the two lovers.

Louis went up to *Rénée* and gave her his arm, without uttering a word, and *Rénée* took it as he gave it, silently, and thus, arm-in-arm, feeling as if they trod on air, now that life had fulfilled its sweetest promises for them, these two happy ones went down the main street of Manneville, hearing their own story told by every looker-on.

"He went to Paris, he did."

"He got the money to repair the organ."

"All these years she waited for him."

"To think of all he went through to learn music. He a weaver, too."

"Her father burned the letters."

"He is our organist now."

"I always liked *Rénée*, I did."

"God bless them both."

And so the chorus went on till it died away behind Louis and *Rénée* as they wandered together in the quiet autumn landscape.

"And what have you to tell me, *Rénée*?" asked Louis, when his story was ended—a wonderful story of untiring energy—long struggles, and final victory. "What have you been doing all these years?"

"Waiting for you," tenderly answered *Rénée*. Then, raising her soft dark eyes to his, with a smile, she began to sing very sweetly. For Providence had been kind to the faithful girl who sat and waited,

as well as to the brave man who went forth to strive, and Rénée's voice, her beautiful voice, had all come back.

The happiness of Louis would have been perfect if he could have played on the organ of Manneville on his own wedding-day, but as that was impossible, the organist of Fontaine had to come and render him that good service.



OH, SAY!

By Mrs. G. LINNÆUS BANKS.

Oh, say, has the tremulous snowdrop
Rung its bells o'er the frozen mould?
Or the crocus arrayed its lances
As a guard for the cup of gold?
Or timorous eye of the daisy
Peeped out from her veil of grass,
To enquire if the Spring be coming
From the courier-winds that pass?

Oh, say, are the tree-buds swelling,
With a promise of future leaves?
Do the young birds seem to be courting,
Or huddling beneath the eaves?
Have the breezes or sunbeams whispered,
"Surly Winter has ceased to reign?"
Do the brooks run along rejoicing
To escape from his icy chain?

I long for a token of Springtide
Beyond that of lengthening light;
I would fain see an early daisy,
Or a snowdrop so pure and white.
I have lain so long on my pillows,
My soul had so nigh taken wing,
I long for the perfume and promise
That come with the blooms of the Spring!